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INSPIRATION AND POETRY

INSPIRATION AND POETRY

BY
C. M. BOWRA

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PREFACE

I AM afraid that the pieces collected in this book may seem to be too heterogeneous and to betray too wayward and too undisciplined a spirit in the author. They have indeed been composed for different purposes, often for special occasions, and they cover very various ground. None the less nearly all of them treat of poetry in some aspect or other, and since the study of poetry is after all as much a single pursuit as that of music or painting, I hope that they may be found to have some connection with each other and to display something like a point of view or at least to discuss matters with which most lovers of poetry are concerned and which are not too distantly related to the subject treated in the first chapter.

I am grateful to those who have allowed me to print here what has already appeared in earlier versions elsewhere, to the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, to Nottingham University, to the Bohlau-Verlag, Mlinster, to Messrs. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, and to the editors and proprietors of *Golden Horizon*, *Speculum*, *Atlante*, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, and *The Sewanee Review*. I am also grateful to the following for permission to quote from copyright works: Messrs. Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., for the passages from *Verses from Pushkin*, by Oliver Elton; the author's executrix for the lines from translations of poems by Lermontov and Pushkin, from *Russian Literature*, by the Hon. Maurice Baring, published by Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd.; Mrs. Laurence Binyon, for the passages from her husband's version of the *Purgatorio* of Dante; Mr. Basil Blackwell, for the extracts from *Poems of Gil Vicente*, by Aubrey Bell; the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, for the extracts from *The Odes of Horace*, by Hugh Macnaghten; East and West, Ltd., for the lines from Lermontov's 'Because', as translated by the late John Pollen

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C. M. B.

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I

INSPIRATION AND POETRY¹

THE notion that a poet is inspired must be of an incalculable antiquity. It is a common assumption of the Hebrew prophets, who announce that 'the word of the Lord came unto' them and claim authority and attention for what they are going to say by some such introduction as 'Thus saith the Lord'. In different conditions, and without quite the same implications, the Greeks made a similar assumption, as when Homer bids the Muse sing of the wrath of Achilles or tell of the man of many wiles, or when Hesiod relates how, when he was shepherding his lambs under Helicon, the Muses appeared to him and breathed into him a divine voice to celebrate 'things that will be and were aforetime'.² In the dawn of the world the poet sings in the belief that his words come to him from some divine power which chooses him as its intermediary and speaks, as it were, through him. Among simple peoples the idea is not yet dead. When the Russian scholar, Radlov, collected the oral poetry of the Tatar peoples of central Asia, he found among the Kara-Kirghiz of the Tien-Shan mountains a bard who said to him :

I can sing every song; for God has planted the gift of song in my heart. He gives me the word on my tongue without my having to seek it. I have learned none of my songs. All springs up from my inner being and goes forth from it.³

This after all is very much what Homer's imaginary bard Phemius says in the *Odyssey*, when he claims that he is self-taught but a god has planted all kinds of songs in his heart.⁴ This is inspiration in its primitive form. However

¹ Rede lecture, delivered in Cambridge on 1 May 1951.

² *Theogony*, 29 ff.

³ *Proben der Volksliteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme*, v, 17 (St. Petersburg, 1885). ⁴ *Od.* xxiii, 347-8.

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we may explain it, we cannot deny the belief in it or the influence of this belief on the actual task of composition.

When we turn to times which may be called civilised or sophisticated, we find, rather surprisingly, that a similar notion of inspiration exists, even if it has somewhat changed its bearings. Few poets would dismiss it entirely, and when they do, we feel that something is wrong, as when William Morris said: 'That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense; there is no such thing. It is a mere matter of craftsmanship.' Most poets record that at intervals they are filled with an unaccountable power which enables them to create not only more easily but better than at any other time. They assert that there is a difference almost in kind between the verses which seem to come suddenly from nowhere and those other verses which must be manufactured by an effort of will' with great care and trouble. This is what Shelley had in mind when he said: 'Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry".' This remarkable state of affairs accounts for certain distinctions which have been made about poetry since at least the time of the Greeks, when Plato reports Socrates as saying that 'all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed'.¹ Most of us, sooner or later, discriminate between authentic poetry and mere verse, between the real thing and the manufactured article, between *le vers donné* and *le vers calculé*,² between what has a strangely unreckonable power and what is merely apt and adequate. In all such distinctions the notion of inspiration lurks somewhere in the background. Nor has it been discredited by scientific discovery. Despite all its mysterious implications, it is still used by poets in reference to their own creative processes and by critics in assessing their worth.

The modern idea of inspiration is not so different as we

¹ *Ion*, 533 e.

² 'Deux sortes de vers: les vers *donnés* et les vers *calculés*. Les vers *calculés* sont ceux qui se présentent nécessairement sous forme de *problèmes à résoudre* — et qui ont pour conditions initiales d'abord les vers *donnés*, et ensuite la rime, la syntaxe, le sens déjà engagé's par ces *données*.' Paul Valéry, *Tel quel*, i, 150.

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might expect from the primitive. There are of course points of divergence. The modern poet is not primarily a prophet like Amos or Hosea or even, to judge by his claims, Hesiod. The primitive poet asserts that everything comes to him from some external, supernatural power and that he himself is little more than its mouthpiece, while the modern takes more credit to himself for what he does, and indeed usually does a good deal to polish and complete what has come to him in inspired moments. Nor is primitive poetry, however inspired, always at a high level. Much, it must be admitted, is poor stuff. A god may dictate it, but he does not always give of his best. But when we say that a modern poem is inspired, we mean that it is of an unusual excellence in a special way. We assume that inspiration accounts not so much for a poem's existence as for its worth, and in this we differ from our distant ancestors, who thought that a poem is anyhow so remarkable that only divine prompting can account for it. But if we have grown more fastidious in our ascription of inspiration, we still accept the old notion of it in one or two important respects. We still assume that it comes somehow from sources outside the poet's own control, even if we ascribe it to his unconscious self or to some innate powers which he is not able to summon at will. Moreover, although we admit that poetry is conceivable without inspiration, we do not feel confident that it would be very good or that it would give all that we ask from it. In fact in poetry, as in the other arts, we are liable to assume the existence of inspiration, even if we do not say very much about it. We certainly do not like to maintain that a poet is a craftsman and no more. Fundamentally the old notion of inspiration has much in common with the modern, since both insist that without it the poet is unable to fulfil his proper task.

To understand what truth there is in these ideas and what inspiration is, we must try to see how it works. Though the evidence for this is not so complete as we might like, and is indeed lacking for many poets of the past, it is enough to provide a clear and consistent picture. It is true that inspiration comes in many different ways and by a variety of processes. If Housman found that it came when he was not

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in the best of health, and then usually after luncheon, when he had taken a pint of beer, this is not true of other poets. For Tasso the key was a rich melancholy, for Wordsworth an awe akin to fear, for Dante love, for Coleridge joy, for Rilke anguish. To most poets inspiration comes when it wills and has no system in its arrivals and departures. But though it comes in strange Ways and varies greatly in the strength and the length of its visitations, yet, while these last, it seems to work in much the same way wherever it occurs. What modern poets say of themselves is quite consistent with what we know of poets of the past and their methods of composition. Though some of our evidence may come from poets not of the highest rank, it is none the less relevant, since a lesser poet differs from a greater not in the nature of his inspiration but in the degree of its duration and its strength.

From this evidence we can form something like a general picture of what happens. In the first place, inspiration manifests itself in a manner which no one can mistake. The poet unaccountably finds himself dominated by something which absorbs his being and excludes other interests from his mind. It is not easy to define exactly what this is, but we may mark certain elements in it. Central to it is something which may be called an idea, though in some ways it is too vague to deserve the name. It has a powerful character and atmosphere of its own, and though at first it is too indefinite for intellectual analysis, it imposes itself on the poet with the majesty and authority of vision. Even if he does not fully understand it, he feels it and almost sees it. This is usually accompanied by words which fall into rhythmical patterns, sometimes without the poet knowing what they mean, though he is singularly attracted to them and cannot but make the most of them, confident that they will yield their meaning to him later. The Russian poet, Vladislav Khodasevich, describes what happens at this stage :

Бессвязные страстные речи!
Нельзя в них понять ничего,
Но звуки правдивее смысла,
И слово сильнее всего.

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**И музыка, музыка, музыка
Вплетается в пенье мое
И узкое, узкое, узкое
Пронзает меня лезвие.**

(What a vague, what a passionate murmur
Lacking any intelligent plan ;
But a sound may be truer than reason,
And a word may be stronger than man.

And then melody, melody, melody
Blends my accents and joins in their quest,
And a delicate, delicate, delicate
Pointed blade seems to enter my breast.)
(V. Nabokov)

This* state is not static but dynamic, a source of vivid, almost violent activity. It begins at once to shoot out ideas of great force and intensity, and these are often accompanied by words which not only clarify them and relate them to the general scheme but are themselves of an unusual force and intensity. Inspiration sets to work with a will which nothing can withstand.

In many cases an idea may move faster than the words which pursue it, and the poet is hard pressed to keep up with it. We can see evidence for this in Pushkin's manuscripts. He will often write down complete lines and variant versions of them as if trying to catch the absolutely right effect, but no less often he will leave gaps and race after the next theme which lures him on, setting down a few odd words, a phrase or a rhyme or a mere clue to what he wishes to say. The whole thing seems to have been done at an extraordinary speed, as if the inspiring thoughts were often too fast for the words which pant after them. But so lively and powerful is the source of energy, so rich in suggestions and so actively at work in his consciousness, that he is able to come back to it and fill in the gaps later by reference to it. Though few poets work with Pushkin's speed and abundance, most know something like his condition. In this process, what begins by being almost unconscious becomes conscious ; what is at the start an outburst of energy infused with a vague idea

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or an undifferentiated vision becomes concrete and definite ; what is outside the poet's control is gradually made to submit to his will and judgment. Such, or something like it, seems to be the usual experience of poets, and such primarily inspiration is.

While such a fit is on him, the poet has a sense of inexhaustible abundance and does not question that the visitation will give him all, and more than all, that he needs for his task. Indeed, he does not ask such a question ; so busy is he with his creative excitement and the words which it demands and provides. What such a condition means to him can be seen from words which Goethe wrote in his riper years about his inspired youth :

So gib mir auch die Zeiten wieder,
Da ich noch selbst im Werden war,
Da sich ein Quell gedrängter Lieder
Ununterbrochen neu gebär,
Da Nebel mir die Welt verhüllten,
Die Knospe Wunder noch versprach,
Da ich die tausend Blumen brach,
Die alle Täler reichlich füllten.

(Then give me back youth's golden prime,
When my own spirit too was growing,
When from my heart th' unbidden rhyme
Gush'd forth, a fount for ever flowing ;
Then shadowy mist the world conceal'd,
And every bud sweet promise made
Of wonders yet to be reveal'd,
As through the vales, with blooms inlaid,
Culling a thousand flowers I stray'd.)

(Anna Swanwick)

This state of mind is of some importance to the creative act, because it enables the poet to give himself entirely to his task and think of nothing else, to exert every faculty in the assurance that he can now do his utmost and that nothing will hinder him. Only with such an assurance can he put out that last effort and concentration which is needed to make a unique work of art. Paul Valéry

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describes this condition with knowledge and accuracy in *Poésie*:

Dieu perdu dans son essence,
Et délicieusement
Docile à la connaissance
Du suprême apaisement,

Je touchais à la nuit pure,
Je ne savais plus mourir,
Car un fleuve sans coupure
Me semblait me parcourir.

Of course the visits of inspiration may end as suddenly and as unaccountably as they began, but, while they last, they enable the poet to work at the full stretch of his powers because he feels that anything is possible for him.

Paradoxically this condition is one of joy. Whatever may have preceded it, whatever disasters or conflicts, whatever grief or anguish may be the start and the subject of the poet's inspired activity, once inspiration is with him, he works in delight, in a rapturous confidence that all is going well and that something ineffably exciting is happening. This joy is by no means confined to those like Shelley and Blake who write in a torrent of ecstatic energy ; it is shared even by those who control their inspired moments with firm discipline and rigorous criticism. For instance, Horace is hardly an ecstatic poet, but even for him poetical inspiration is an occasion for Dionysiac joy. In one poem he takes us near to the secrets of his creative being, when he tells how he hears Bacchus on the mountains and himself feels the Bacchic frenzy. In this moment he knows that nature can work miracles in defiance of her own laws and that the divine spirit of song is stronger than death. The inspiring force which Horace personifies in Bacchus is what he himself feels when he is inspired to write poetry ; and it is, despite all his anxiety and fear, a state of joy :

Euhoe, recenti mens trepidat metu
plenoque Bacchi pectore turbidum
laetatur ; Euhoe, parce Liber,
parce gravi metuende thyrsos.

(C. ii, 19, 5-8)

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(Still reels my mind with joy and holy fear,
Still throbs my heart with presence of the God;
I faint, I tremble — mighty Liber, hear!
Spare me the terrors of thy rod.)

(E. Marsh)

Despite his moderation and self-control, Horace resembles other poets when inspiration comes to him, and knows that nothing can resist its enthralling exaltation.

This joy, and the sense of power which accompanies it, are related to the poet's conviction that he is free to create on a noble scale and that the exercise of his capacities is so enthralling that nothing else is comparable to it. Indeed, the mere thought of such creation is so exciting that it may itself inspire the poet to a vision of it in its essential purity and power, when it is divorced from its particular manifestations and becomes an ideal with its own enchantment. This surely is the subject of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. The doings of the Mongol emperor provide a start, but we soon see that Coleridge is really concerned with something more mysterious and more wonderful. His subject in fact is inspiration in its ideal, least restricted, most disembarrassed and most disembodied form. As Coleridge describes the building of the pleasure-dome, he passes beyond and behind it to the essential experience of creation and presents in words which are themselves inspired his dream of a supreme inspiration :

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw :
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome, those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

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Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes in holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Such is creative inspiration. Coleridge shows its sense of unlimited possibilities, its superhuman power, its rapturous joy. If few poets have known this condition in all its strength and purity, many will recognise in it the archetype of their own inspired moments.

The all-absorbing activity which comes with inspiration means that the poet not only forgets anything outside the immediate object of his vision but loses his sense of time. Past and future no longer exist for him, and he enjoys a timeless condition. Nor is this condition negative, a mere state of omissions and absences. It is strikingly positive. In it the poet feels that his whole being is enlarged and that he is able to enjoy in an unprecedented completeness what in his ordinary life he enjoys only in fragments with after-thoughts and misgivings and distractions. This experience receives its fullest treatment from the Romantics, who use for it the word 'eternity' and through this seek to convey its absolute, all-absorbing character. For Blake the man who exerts his imagination 'lives in eternity's sun rise'. For Wordsworth the elements of natural scenery in the Simplon Pass are

The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

For Keats the lovers on the Grecian Urn are embodiments of a timeless joy, which is the counterpart of what the poet himself knows in the act of creation. So too in our own time poets have claimed that, while inspiration is at work, time is transcended or annihilated. Rilke finds the ideal condition of the poet in something akin to childhood, when what lies behind is not the past and no future lies before, when, in what he calls some interspace between the world and a play-thing, we entertain ourselves with the everlasting. So too Alexander Blok tells how amid a miraculous transformation

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of experience time stands still, the present disappears, and the future mirrors the past. Inspiration, according to many poets, creates a state in which they see as a whole what normally they see only in fragments as parts of a temporal process, and are able to grasp from outside in the full pattern of its movement what normally they know only from inside in separate and limited stages of development. It is not surprising that in such circumstances they feel that they have passed into eternity.

This condition is often also one of an extraordinary illumination, for which the poets use the imagery of light. Nor is this a mere loan from the language of religion. Just as the mystic may have moments when he is flooded with something which he can only call light because it makes him feel that he understands much in an order of things which is almost past understanding, so the poet, in his ecstatic inspiration, feels something similar. Indeed, the affinity of the two states may be seen in Henry Vaughan's lines :

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great *Ring* of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd, in which the world
And all her train were hurl'd.

Vaughan speaks at once from both a religious and a poetical point of view. The miraculous illumination which he enjoys reveals what the world really is and enables him to see it with an exalted detachment and clairvoyant insight. At the very end of the poem he comes to the vision of God, but till then his vision is of the world, and in this he is a poet, enjoying a supreme experience which is closely connected with his conviction that he is in the presence of eternity. In the same way, when Pindar dwells on those moments when through song man comes near to the deathless felicity of the gods, he too speaks of light and knows that it is divine. Of all the figures which he uses for poetry this is the one which

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he loves best and which takes us deepest into the springs of his creative life :

*ἐπάμερον· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ
ἄνθρωπος. ἀλλ' ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ,
λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεισιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μέλιχος αἰών.*
(Pyth. viii, 95-7)

(Man's life is a day. What is he ?
What is he not ? A shadow in a dream
Is man, but when God sends a brightness,
Shining light is on earth
And life is sweet as honey.)

Nor is it an accident that Blake couples eternity with sunrise, or Blok tells how in the rapture of inspiration light accompanies music and movement in timeless ecstasy, or Wordsworth, trying to unravel the central secrets of creative art, speaks of

The light that never was on sea or land.

In the wonderful liberation and expansion of his powers which come to the poet when he is free from the imprisoning sense of time, he is sustained by vision, by a radiant revelation which reveals to him the true nature and significance of things in their glory and marvel, and this, with perfect appropriateness, he calls by the name of light.

The characteristics which we have considered seem to belong to inspiration almost everywhere where it occurs, or at least where we have information about it. They are essential elements in the inspired state and illustrate what it means to its recipients. But there is a danger that in stressing the extraordinary powers of inspiration we may underestimate the obligations which it puts on the poet and the efforts which it demands of him. That it may work to its fullest capacity and gather its utmost rewards the poet too must play his part to the full and make every possible use of his God-given opportunity. He must be his own critic and decide which are the right words among the many which come to him ; he must exclude much that at first sight looks attractive, and adapt the outpourings of inspiration to the creative impulse which animates his poem. Of this Dante

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was well aware when in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* he issued a warning to those poets who think that they can secure the most sublime results without knowing their own craft :

Therefore let the folly of those be confuted, who free of art and knowledge and trusting in genius alone, rush forward-to sing of the highest themes in the highest style. Let them cease from such presumption, and if by nature and sloth they are but geese, let them not try to imitate the eagle soaring to the stars.¹

Dante, who knew what inspiration is, knew also that-it is of little avail unless its recipient is a master of his technique and prepared to take considerable pains with its gifts when he receives them.

In these rapturous moments inspiration and criticism may seem an oddly assorted pair, but it is a remarkable fact that the greatest poets are usually able to combine them. Good evidence comes from Pushkin, who in the very frenzy of creation, when words and ideas were galloping through his mind, was able to apply a relentless criticism and selection and to reduce everything to a serene and flawless harmony. A friend describes his manner of work :

He used to write hundreds of lines in a day. If he did not happen to arrange his thoughts in verse, he expressed them in prose. Then he corrected what he had written, sometimes suppressing three-quarters of the first version. I have seen in his possession sheets of paper so crossed out that it was impossible to decipher anything above the erased lines, in such a way that one did not find a single clean space on the paper.

Pushkin's manuscripts confirm this account. Since he composed with great speed, it is clear that in his case inspired energy was countered and disciplined almost simultaneously by an extremely sharp critical sense, and we can understand why he himself insisted that the impulse to write is properly called 'enthusiasm' and the critical activity 'inspiration'. In his case the two were so closely associated that it is hard to distinguish between them, and the work of correction is certainly quite as inspired as the first onrush of words and ideas.

¹ ii, 4-

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It is tempting to see in Pushkin's methods a clue to Shakespeare's, of which we know little more than Ben Jonson's often quoted words :

I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech.

That Shakespeare wrote his plays in an inspired rush of energy we can hardly doubt. And though of course he may not always write at the top of his powers, he maintains an astonishing, an incredible level. That he did not work like Pushkin is clear enough. Jonson's word is final against it. But it is at least likely that with him the creative activity was so closely connected with a critical sense and with a clear idea of what he wanted to say and what was worth saying, that in the very act of shaping words in his head he did the same kind of thing that Pushkin did on paper. To achieve what he did, with so infallible a sense of effect, shows that he did naturally and easily what most poets do by hard and halting effort. Even if whole passages came to him from inspiration, he would still have to put them in order, and this he must have done with a lightning speed and an incomparable judgment. He knew better than Jonson what his own kind of poetry was, and seems to have secured what he wanted while the white-hot words were still falling into sentences in his mind.

Of course very few poets indeed have the gifts of Shakespeare or Pushkin, and many face the problem in other ways. At one extreme are those who do not so much face it as deny its existence, who accept the gifts of inspiration with a devotion which forbids criticism or improvement. Such was Shelley. He was beyond doubt inspired. His words came to him in floods, and he believed that they came to him from some ideal, spiritual world and that his task was little more than to record them faithfully. But inspiration needs more than this. It calls for a discriminating judgment in composition, and this is what we miss in Shelley. His wonderful phrases are held together by others which are less wonderful,

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because he has not made the necessary effort to raise everything to the same level, and to this degree he is even untrue to his creative vision, since he does not get as much out of it as it deserves or has to give. Something similar may be true of Blake, not indeed in his songs, on which he worked with a sure judgment, but in his prophetic books, about one of which he wrote to Thomas Butts : 'I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be other than the Secretary ; the Authors are in Eternity'. This is magnificent, but it means that the prophetic books are of an uneven quality and that their originating visions and ideas are sometimes inadequately maintained. Both Shelley and Blake were inspired if ever man was, but neither made the most of his inspiration by submitting it to discipline. It is instructive to compare them with Keats. In his first years Keats held Shelley's view that 'if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all'. Keats fortunately changed his mind, and the result was the great increase in strength and depth which came with the great Odes.

A second difficulty in the treatment of inspiration has been described by A. E. Housman in his account of his own creative processes. He begins by telling how

there would flow into my mind, with a sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of.¹

He then goes on to tell how, after these promising beginnings, the inspiration ran out, except for the general idea of the poem :

Sometimes the poem had to be taken in hand and completed by the brain, which was apt to be a matter of trouble and anxiety, involving trial and disappointment, and sometimes ending in failure.

The process which Housman describes is familiar to many. What begins with radiant and alluring possibilities suddenly comes to an end, and the poet has no more than a few verses and lines, which are far from making a complete poem. At this point some abandon the task. Shelley was quite

¹ *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 50 (Cambridge, 1933).

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consistent if, when a poem did not complete itself, he refused to complete it, and that is why he left so many fragments. Others cannot afford to be so extravagant, and feel that they must do by an act of will and intellect what they hoped to do by inspiration. The additions and completions so made are not necessarily inferior to what has been done by inspiration. The poet is still guided by the creative vision which set him to work and by the melody and tone of what he has already written. None the less his task is of great difficulty. Words; which before came easily, now come slowly and only with much coaxing, and tend to lack the strange individuality with which inspiration invests them. Indeed, with some poets we feel that after a magnificent start inspiration flags almost at once and the poet never quite regains that special pitch of power and richness. In various ways this seems to be true of Horace, Donne, Burns, and Baudelaire, all of whom often start with lines that rivet our attention and then continue with others which are undeniably distinguished and impressive but less unusual and less striking, or at least not striking in the same way.

The behaviour of inspiration may be even more tantalising than this. To some poets the inspired and inspiring vision seems to come without any great accompaniment of words for its expression. The poet responds to it with all his nature and is obsessed by it, but from the very start he has to work hard to give it shape. Yet so powerful is it that, though the words come slowly and painfully after much search and trial, they catch fire from it because it is so lively and persistent. Of course this does not happen unless the poet is a master-craftsman who knows exactly what kind of words he needs, but, if he is, they come in the end with an uncommon force in answer to his patient efforts. This was the case with Yeats in his later years. As a young man he heard

A clear articulation in the air

and wrote his first poems from it, but later this deserted him, and he worked by a different method. He would begin with an idea, which so excited and obsessed him that he could think of little else. He would write it down, often in prose,

and then work at it for weeks, until he produced a poem which fully expressed it and was worthy of it. This can be seen in the many drafts of *Sailing to Byzantium*.¹ The main idea and some of the images are there at the start, but the final words came with unremitting search and ruthless excision. What sustained Yeats in this exacting task was the luminous, active presence of the first idea in the full range of its associations and possibilities. As he brooded over it and kept close to it, he saw its many implications and was determined to lose none of its richness. As he toiled at his task and thought four or six lines a good day's work, this presence would help him to the words which he needed. Even when he had written a poem with which most poets would be satisfied, Yeats still tried to put more into it, to make it conform more closely to his original idea, until at last he had something which pleased him. With Yeats inspiration worked slowly but with great sureness. By his tenacious hold on the first animating idea he was able in the end to write a poem worthy of it.

This may be an unusual state of affairs, and perhaps in Yeats the free onrush of inspiration was hampered partly by his sceptical intelligence and love of theory, partly by his deliberate change of style in middle age. Yet it is tempting to think that this was also the way in which Virgil composed, not indeed the *Georgics*, which are said to have come to him in abundant flood before he reduced them by extensive cuts, but the *Aeneid*. He began by writing a rough draft in prose, which no doubt represented his animating idea. This he would turn into verse, not on any plan but haphazard as the fancy seized him, and this suggests that his inspiration came, as we might expect, waywardly and unaccountably, taking him now to this theme, now to that. Even in doing this he would leave passages and lines unfinished, because he could not find the right words for what he had to say, or would complete them with what he called 'props', temporary verses of no weight or worth, designed to do makeshift duty until they were replaced by permanent, strong verses, which he

¹ Cf. A. N. Jeffares, 'The Byzantine Poems of W. B. Yeats', in *Review of English Studies*, xxii, 1946.

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compared to the columns of a building. Whatever defects Virgil may have found in the *Aeneid* when on his death-bed he ordered it to be destroyed, his primary idea was powerful enough to carry him through the main work of composition at an extraordinary level of accomplishment.

Another problem concerning inspiration was raised with some force by Shelley. Speaking of the 'invisible influence' which enables a poet to create, he says :

Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the result; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline and the most glorious poetry that has been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.

In thinking this Shelley is not alone. Alexander Blok expresses himself to very much the same effect when in his poem *Artist*, after recounting the rapturous state in which inspired creation begins, he contrasts with it the mere poem which is the result. The exercise of the mind, which is necessary to writing a poem, seems to him a kind of murder. When it begins to work, it kills the vision, with the result that the poem is like a bird which swings on a hoop in a steel cage and sings its songs mechanically by heart. Not all poets are likely to feel this so strongly as Shelley and Blok, who were primarily concerned with transcendental worlds beyond the reach of most men, but many probably feel that the final poem is an inadequate substitute for the first, enthralling experience. At the back of their minds, haunting and challenging and mocking them, is the ideal poem which should catch every hint and hue of the first rapture, and they know that this ideal poem will never be written. Perhaps it cannot be. The poet works with words, and words have many foibles and defects. They can hardly ever do all that is asked of them ; they may always slip and shirk and fail when it comes to the supreme effort. None the less, though perhaps the vision can never be conveyed in its entirety, almost all that matters comes from it, and without it poetry could hardly exist.

Inspiration raises a special problem in the case of poems

whose composition is on a large scale and may occupy many years. Here we have to reckon not merely with a first inspiring experience but with something like prolonged visits of inspiration after it. The curious thing is that the later visits supplement and continue the first and enable the poet to maintain a remarkable unity of vision and 'temper through a long work. Though Milton was slow to form the full idea of *Paradise Lost*, yet, once he had formed it, it awoke his inspiration, which then strengthened and sustained him in composition with what seem to have been almost regular visitations, especially at night and at dawn. How again can we explain the wealth of superb passages in the *Divine Comedy* except on the assumption that Dante was moved at the start by something very like a vision, of which the living memory stayed with him and was supplemented by many hours of inspired energy? Different though Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is from the *Divine Comedy*, it has, if anything, a more evenly sustained brilliance in its flawless harmonies and its enchanted atmosphere midway between truth and fancy. It too implies both a dominating vision and many later periods of sustained inspiration.¹ Nor again can we explain the incredible performance of Shakespeare except on the theory that, when he first conceived the idea of a play, he saw it so clearly and felt it so intensely that it remained actively with him through the whole task of composition, but was assisted and enriched by many moments of new inspiration, which indeed conformed to the first vision but added immeasurable new vistas to it. In these eminent cases inspiration is not only maintained through a long period, but through this period remains faithful to its first character and enables a poet to produce a work of art on a large scale. To a divinely gifted few it comes in an inconceivable abundance, but even then it keeps its essential characteristics and makes its indispensable demands.

¹ Even after publishing the *Orlando Furioso* in 1516 Ariosto continued to work at it. In the edition of 1532 some seven hundred stanzas have been added and the whole work increased by six cantos. At the same time Ariosto worked on the original stanzas until hardly one remains in its first form. The MSS of the material for the edition of 1532 survive, and some of them show how great the revisions were even at this stage.

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So far we have looked at inspiration from the poet's point of view and tried to see it as he sees it. It is indeed necessary to him, since from it he derives the peculiar energy which enables him to create. But this does not explain why the verses which he writes in these strange conditions are also those which usually make the strongest appeal to his readers and seem to have a special, almost a unique quality. We claim that we recognise some passages or poems to be inspired and assume that what comes most immediately and most unexpectedly to a poet is also what strikes us as most wonderful and enthralling. *A priori* this sounds unlikely. Why should the lines which come so strangely to a poet strike us so forcibly ? What quality have they which makes us respond so readily to them ? It is certainly odd that this should be so, and yet we can hardly doubt it. Poems which are known to have been conceived by their authors in inspired moments are often those which move us most powerfully. Milton was carried through *Paradise Lost* by what he believed to be the prompting of the Holy Spirit; when Tasso tried to write as the academicians said that he should, he failed disastrously, but when he followed his inspiration, he was triumphantly successful; Blake's most rapturous songs were written in visionary exaltation ; Pushkin did not write poetry at all unless he felt that he was possessed, and that is why his level of achievement is so marvellously sustained ; Burns was unable to write by an effort of will, and when he tried to do so, produced work of no value ; if ever a poem strikes us as inspired, it is *Kubla Khan*, which came to Coleridge in a trance ; Blok's most powerful poems were born from a condition of ecstasy. There is no doubt of the fact: what the poets have conceived through inspiration is also what we feel to be their most essential and most authentic poetry, and we are justified in calling it inspired.

This is true and important, but it does not explain why, when we call a poem inspired, we are moved to do so not by what has happened to the poet, since of that we usually know nothing, but by something else which forces us to assume that inspiration has been at work. What counts with us is the quality of the poetry itself, and our instinctive judgment is

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that this can only be inspired. In doing this we may be guided largely by what may be called external symptoms, as when a poem haunts us with a peculiar insistence, or evokes tears or joy or a special excitement which is beyond both, or even when, as Housman claims, it produces a shiver down the spine or a sensation in the pit of the stomach. But these are no more than symptoms and cannot be accepted as proof. They are helpful indications that something is afoot, but they do not explain what it is or why it so affects us. Nor, strictly speaking, are such symptoms confined to poetry which our ripper judgment continues to think good. They may even accompany work which in due course we see to be false or feeble. Our judgment that a poem is inspired should be based on firmer foundations, and in fact it is. If we look into the question, we see that inspired poetry has certain qualities which are responsible for its hold on us and for our continued delight in it.

In the first place, when we say that a poem is inspired, we mean that it has an unusual degree of power, that we see and feel in it much more than in most other poetry and vastly more than in the ordinary use of written or spoken words. This is true not only of short poems, like Shakespeare's songs, which are the pure essence of melody, but of works composed on a large scale in which there may indeed be falterings and shortcomings but whose whole achievement leaves us breathless with wonder and delight. It is not a question of finding something new in them each time that we go to them, though this may well be the case. It is rather that at the very first impact we are entirely absorbed and enchanted, that we feel ourselves in the presence of countless, varied experiences, all of which enrich and strengthen a single, united effect. However simple a line may look, it may still contain unfathomable depths and incalculable abundance. When we turn it over in our minds, it presents new lights and awakes new thoughts and echoes and associations. Just as in inspired creation the poet feels that no possibilities are closed to him, so the inspired work presents so great a concentration of living experience that numberless powers seem to converge on a single point in perfect order and harmony. What is so ordered and presented is extremely rich and extremely direct. The essence of many

tumultuous or vivid hours seems to have been distilled into it, and when we feel this at work, we see that it comes from some activity of the creative mind which is quite unlike anything known to us in our ordinary hours.

In such poems we also feel that the poet is more truly himself than at any other time, that he does with a new power what he alone can do, that he exerts his individual gifts to the furthest stretch of his being. The greatest poetry possesses in an extraordinary degree this capacity for showing a poet's gifts in their most personal manifestation. It is when a poet is most inspired that he creates something which is the unique reflection of his experience in its full individuality and of his special vision in its peculiar clairvoyance. In his less inspired moments he may speak much as other men do, but now he speaks as he alone can. All his labours to fashion a style, to decide what kind of poetry he should write, are suddenly rewarded by what looks like an effortless success, since in it he feels no strain or hesitation or uncertainty. Such moments come even to those whose interest in the theory of their art seems to restrict their creative energy. For instance, Leopardi wrote no more than some thirty poems in his life, and none of them is very long. No doubt this small output was largely due to his obsession with theories of what poetry ought to be ; for few men have given so much hard thought to the matter. For this he was rewarded by times when, without any apparent effort, he would compose poems of extraordinary power, which conform entirely to his idea of what they ought to be. He wrote *Il sabato del villaggio* in one day and *A Sylvia* in two. Yet these two pieces are flawless creations, which contain in an eminent degree his most characteristic gifts, his capacity for conveying a visible scene in the fewest possible words, his contrast of some happy occasion with a bleak and bitter background of common misery, his rhythmical movement which responds at every turn to the changes of his moods, his classical grace and intensity and candour. In these poems Leopardi did what he alone could do and is completely himself. In the very degree of this individuality we may recognise the workings of inspiration.

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Inspiration also enables a poet to make the utmost of whatever technique he has. If he has mastered it and has it at his finger-tips, he will make much more of what inspiration brings to him. Such a technique may be largely traditional, as it is with Homer, or contain many of the poet's own innovations, as it does with Rimbaud, but in either case inspiration stirs the poet to take bold risks with it and to stretch its potentialities to the limit. Indeed, the more difficult a technique is, the greater are the opportunities which inspiration offers for exploiting it, since it makes even the greatest obstacles look trivial and strengthens the poet to look beyond the mere difficulty to the furthest range of possible effects. Some techniques, for instance, are difficult simply because of the narrow scope and the strict bounds which they impose on a poet, forcing him to do everything within a small range of formal devices. Inspiration gives him the power to turn these restrictions into positive assets, to feel so at home with them that he manipulates them with delighted agility, as when Homer uses a traditional store of formulaic phrases with an astonishing aptness, or Virgil explores the possibilities of varied sound and changing rhythm inside the narrow form of the Latin hexameter, or Racine so handles the staid and often monotonous Alexandrine that it seems to be the very voice of passion, stripped of everything but its essential power. On the other hand a complex art, which might seem to demand for its successful performance an almost mathematical ingenuity, may, just because of its complexity, become under the urge of inspiration an instrument of great freedom and flexibility. If the language and metres of Greek lyric poetry are among the most amazing inventions of man, that is largely because through their very elaboration they present to the inspired poet a challenge which he cannot but accept; and once he has accepted it, he finds in their complexity an instrument of unparalleled variety and expressiveness. One of the miracles of Pindar's art is the way in which he makes a most elaborate metrical system a vehicle for rich and rapid verse. At his greatest moments he combines an extraordinary depth and wealth of poetry with a movement which is at once light and majestic

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and musical. Nor is he alone in this. Let us, for instance, take some lines which at the end of his long life, when he was nearly ninety years old, Sophocles wrote about the miseries of old age :

ὅστις τοῦ πλέονος μέρους
 χρήζει τοῦ μετρίου παρεῖς
 ζῶειν, σκαιοσύναν φυλάσ-
 σων ἐν ἐμοὶ κατὰδῃλος ἔσται·
 ἐπεὶ πολλὰ μὲν αἱ μακραὶ
 ἡμέραι κατέθεντο δῇ
 λύπας ἐγγυτέρω, τὰ τέρ-
 ποντα δ' οὐκ ἂν ἰδοῖς ὅποι,
 ὅταν τις ἐς πλεον πέσῃ
 τοῦ δέοντος· ὁ δ' ἐπίκουρος ἰσοτέλεστος
 "Αἶδος ὅτε μοῖρ' ἀνυμέναιος
 ἄλλυρος ἄχορος ἀναπέφηνε
 θάνατος ἐς τελευτάν.

(O.C. 1211-23)

(What man is he that yearneth
 For length unmeasured of days ?
 Folly mine eye discerneth
 Encompassing all his ways.
 For years over-running the measure
 Shall change thee in evil wise:
 Grief draweth nigh thee ; and pleasure,
 Behold, it is hid from thine eyes.
 This to their wage have they
 Which overlive their day.
 And He that looseth from labour
 Doth one with other befriend,
 Whom bride nor bridesmen attend,
 Song, nor sound of the tabor,
 Death, that maketh an end.)

(A. E. Housman)

We may, if we like, analyse the metrical structure of this wonderful melody and resolve it into its constituent elements, and it is worth doing, because it shows how ingeniously constructed it is. But when we read it, we think not of the metrical scheme but of the resonant music, and this is more than satisfying. The Greek art of song has been set in motion by the divine breath of the Muse, and here is the

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result. Just because Sophocles uses his complex metrical plan so easily and so naturally, we may be sure that inspiration has helped him.

Inspired accomplishment of this kind at this level shows what the poet can do to supplement the strange and sudden force which sets him to work. Above all he* must use his intelligence, not merely for Criticism but as an actual instrument in composition. His mind must move as powerfully and swiftly as his eye or his ear. It must submit to the inspiring force and respond to its driving persuasion. Indeed, it can hardly avoid doing so, since one of the peculiarities of inspiration is that it lays hold of the intellect and forces it to make its proper contribution. It is sometimes assumed that inspiration is irrational, defies or dodges the critical intelligence, and has no truck with hard thought. But in the greatest works of man the active mind has always played a prominent part. It is abundantly present in Homer, in Aeschylus, in Virgil, in Dante, in Shakespeare, in Pushkin ; it is no less present in Pindar, in Blake, in Hölderlin, in Rimbaud, in many poets who have powerful emotions and intemperate visions. Modern attempts to divorce poetry from reason seem doomed to failure, because it is an essential part of the human consciousness, and it is the whole of this consciousness, not merely this or that part of it, which inspiration sets to work.

In inspired words there is still something else which is hard to define but familiar to anyone who knows what poetry is. The most powerful and most authentic poetry is a richer source of life than any other form of words. It creates in us the kind of exaltation which the poet himself has known in his hours of vision and enraptured creation. We cannot explain how this happens. It is part of the mystery of words. They are a means of communication, and they communicate a great deal more than ideas. At their best they communicate something so powerful that it makes us live more abundantly. This is much more than a matter of richness of content or intensity of emotion or even clarity of vision. All these may contribute to it, and all these we may recognise in it, but the central, final, and inescapable fact is that inspired words

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create life in us because they are themselves alive. Just because they are fixed and settled, their vitality is enhanced and enables us to find in them stores of abounding strength secured from the destructive hand of time. Time is a merciless judge of words, and there are many poems which looked bright enough at their first appearance but are now so drab and dowdy that we cannot endure to read them. Only the best verses survive, and chief among them are those to which inspiration has given a share of its own uninhibited energy and timeless delight.

II

THE ODES OF HORACE

IT is the fate of Horace's Odes that anyone who knows them at all usually knows them so well that he hardly regards them as poetry in the fullest sense. A familiarity inculcated at school does not actually kill our appreciation of them but makes us like them more for their secondary than for their primary qualities. They are indeed rich in the accidental virtues of poetry. Their abundance of quotable lines; their wise observations on many aspects of behaviour, their closeness to much that the ordinary man knows and loves, even their wonderful technical accomplishment, all conspire to hide that they were intended to be poetry and to make their first appeal as poetry. Unlike the works of Catullus and Lucretius, they do not overwhelm the young by an irresistible attack, but appeal in a quieter, less disturbing way, which is not quite what youth demands. This habit, formed early in life, may persist into middle age. We accept Horace; we respect, we admire, we like him. But he has not that special, sacred place which we accord to those whose inspiration sweeps in rapturous onslaught and carries all before it. In the end we may perhaps dismiss him and say that, compared with Catullus, he lacks the authentic divine fire; or, conversely, we may admire him just for this reason and find his mastery of technique so satisfying that we ask for nothing more. But both positions are built on false assumptions. Horace is indeed a true, even a great, poet, and great not merely in his apt choice and arrangement of words but for a strange, unusual power in them.

The usual approach to the Odes is hampered by comparisons which we inevitably make between Horace and Catullus or Sappho or Alcaeus. For such comparisons he himself must bear some of the responsibility, since these

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poets were in certain ways his models, whose metres and themes and phrases he adopted. At the end of Book III he claims that he has been the first to adapt Aeolian song to Italian measures. Naturally we compare him with his masters and find that he lacks their essential qualities, their speed and directness, their uncomplicated and unconcealed emotions, their incomparable lilt. When Horace writes about the gods or war or wine or love, we feel that something is missing which his models have in abundance, not merely a single, concentrated approach to experience but a fire and magic which survive in them, as Horace himself saw when he said of Sappho :

vivuntque commissi calores

Aeoliae fidibus puellae.

(IV,9, 11-12)

(Still breathes and burns to-day the amorous tale
That Sappho whispered to the Aeolian strings.)

(E. Marsh)

So long as we compare Horace with Sappho or Catullus and judge his work by theirs, we find him wanting. Yet though he began the comparison himself, it is not in any resemblance to them that his strength lies. To understand and appreciate his achievement at its proper worth we must look not to his models but to his own creative personality and to the age which helped to form it. We shall then see how remarkable his work is, and how worthy of the name of poetry.

Horace belonged to the class of poets who have indeed their inexplicable, inspired lines, but find that they come singly and slowly and need to be completed and supplemented by hard work. He certainly knew the frenzy of inspiration, which he symbolised by the appearance of Bacchus on the hills (11, 19) or by Nymphs and Satyrs who sever him from the throng of common men (I,1, 31-2). Horace knew that the creative fit has something wild and unearthly in it and cannot he withstood when it comes. But he was not able or content to trust to inspiration alone. He believed that a poem demands hard labour, and he was not joking when he said that it should be kept for nine years (*Ars Poet.* 388). He compares himself to the bee which flits from flower to

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flower, gathering honey, and says that his songs are *operosa*, 'laborious' (IV, 2, 27-32). At times wonderful lines came to him, set the tune and the tone of a poem, and clamoured to be followed by other lines in the same spirit at the same level. And there the difficulty lay. There are some poems of Horace in which we can almost distinguish the 'given' from the 'calculated' lines. He will start with an overpowering dash and brilliance, then continue on a different note to a different effect. The first wild onslaught yields to something more meditated and more elaborate. Such at least is the impression made by poems which begin with such lines as

O fons Bandusiae, splendidior vitro,
(III, 13, 1)
(Bandusian spring, brighter than crystal is,)

or

Quid fles, Asterie, quern tibi candidi
primo restituent vere Favonii ?
(III, 7, 1-2)
(Why weep, Asterie, when white west winds
Will bring him back to you with spring ?)

or

Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,
labuntur anni . . .
(II, 14, 1-2)
(Alas, Postumus, Postumus,
The fleeting years slip past . . .)

or

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
pulsanda tellus.
(I, 37, 1-2)
(Now must we drink, now beat the earth
With naked foot.)

In these openings there is an immediacy of approach, a violent sweep, which is not maintained in the verses that follow. The pace becomes slower, the ideas more intricate, the syntax more elaborate, the unity of mood and impression less complete. Horace seems to have begun some poems in an almost Dionysiac excitement and then found that to complete them he must summon all his resources of patience, hard work, and discriminating selection.

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Though this manner of composition was no doubt dictated in the first place by the nature of Horace's gifts, it suited the practice and theory of poetry in his time. Unlike the great Greeks, the Romans of the late Republic and the Augustan Age were too self-conscious and too finely adapted to a complex social life to be able to burst easily into unpremeditated song. They worked slowly and carefully and liked to distinguish between *ingenium* and *ars*, between natural talent and applied technique. Both, in their view, were equally important, since the first must be disciplined and purified by the second. That Horace shared these views is clear from the recipe for poetry which he gives in his *Ars Poetica*, where he says that though the poet must have natural talent, he must also have enough technique to make a proper use of it. Horace in fact agreed with the treatise *On the Sublime*, itself probably a work of the Augustan Age, that 'the employment of art is every way a fitting aid to nature ; for it is the conjunction of the two which tends to ensure perfection' (36, 3). In a society where such ideas were natural and prevalent, Horace matured his art. He believed that he had been born a poet and lisped in numbers in his cradle (III, 4, 9 ff.), but he also believed that uninstructed and uncontrolled singing was not enough and that he must modify and discipline his inborn talent with all the art that he could command.

Such a conception imposes its own conditions on those who try to put it into practice. In the first place, it demands a strict form. The poet who has to fuse 'given' and 'calculated' verses into a harmonious unity gains much from the restrictions of a rigid frame. It tells him what shape his poem must have, and this to some extent controls its temper. Horace was conscious of this when he contrasted his own art with Pindar's. For him Pindar is like a torrent in spate which breaks its barriers and carries all before it, or like a swan which soars with effortless flight into the air (IV, 2, 5 ff.). This was not how Horace saw himself. His own slower, more laborious methods needed a narrower, more restricted form and found it in the various stanzas used by Sappho and Alcaeus, which are much shorter than Pindar's strophes

and antistrophes and allow a far smaller range of metrical variations and inventions. These stanzas were not perhaps ideally suited to the Latin language, and it is notable that after Horace very few Romans used them. But Horace adapted them with considerable cunning. Since Latin, with its larger proportion of long syllables, is heavier than Greek, Horace's Alcaics and Sapphics and Asclepiads are slower and more weighty than their Greek models, while in the Sapphic line his introduction of an almost compulsory break after the fifth syllable gives a less airy music than we find in Sappho and breaks an essential unity into two distinct parts. If this was imposed on Horace by the nature of the Latin language, it none the less suited his kind of composition. The slower march of the line corresponds with the slower movement of his moods and reflects the solid element of consideration, of experience treasured and assimilated, which goes to all his work. The regularity of his verse-forms and of the movements within them is an indispensable factor in his poetry.

In this kind of composition the poet's first task is to secure a harmony between the 'given' and the 'calculated' elements. He must see that what he himself adds to the inspired lines holds its own with them and fits into the same pattern. Both Donne and Baudelaire, whose gifts were of this intermittent kind, understood the difficulty and met it by giving so great a variety of content to a poem that we pass easily from one tone or manner to another and do not feel any awkward disparity between this and that passage. This is an achievement of style and is far more satisfactory than trying to keep the whole poem at the level of an inspired opening after the inspiration has begun to fade, as Burns sometimes does. We feel that his desire for effortless song is so great that he cannot relinquish it or acquiesce in what he feels to be a mere second-best, and the result is that some of his finest openings are followed by verses indubitably inferior. Donne and Baudelaire work differently. They are content to abandon the first ecstatic mood provided that what follows is itself full and impressive. Their poetry is consequently quite unlike effortless song. The will and the intelligence, allied to a highly cultivated sensibility and a discriminating judgment,

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create true poetry, but it is not song. Its effects are less immediately overwhelming ; it is richer, more impressive, and often more various; thought plays a larger part in it; its texture is closer, and its structure more muscular. If it loses in grace and speed, it gains in dignity. And this is what Horace's poetry also does. It lacks the ubiquitous fire of Sappho and Catullus, but it has other qualities which they have not, and it gives an entirely different kind of pleasure.

The difference may perhaps be expressed by saying that, while effortless song gives the delight of perfect melody, constructed verse relies less on creating a single, melodious impression than on a series of small thrills and striking effects made through the choice and arrangement of words. It reflects not a single, all-absorbing moment but something more complex, and it secures its impression by exploiting not one mood but several. The difference may be illustrated by a comparison between the opening lines of two hymns to Diana, one by Catullus and the other by Horace. Catullus writes with a delightful, innocent, straightforward charm :

Dianae sumus in fide
puellae et pueri integri:
Dianam pueri integri
puellaeque canamus.

(34, 1-4)

(Diana guardeth our estate,
Girls and boys immaculate;
Boys and maidens pure of stain,
Be Diana our refrain.)

(R. C. Jebb)

This is light and lucid and swift, and it contains a single, imaginative experience, the desire of the boys and girls to be worthy of the virgin goddess whom they serve. Horace opens in quite a different strain :

Dianam tenerae dicite virgines,
intonsum, pueri, dicite Cynthium
Latonamque supremo
dilectam penitus lovi.

(I, 21, 1-4)

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(Of Dian's praises, tender maidens, tell;
Of Cynthus' unshorn god, young striplings, sing;
And bright Latona, well
Beloved of Heaven's high King.)

(J. Conington)

Horace, of course, attempts more by singing of Apollo as well as of Diana, but at the start we see a less direct and more elaborate approach. Though the repeated *dicite* has some of Catullus' simplicity, the rest is written with an awareness of many issues and associations. Catullus' theme of innocent devotion is abandoned for a passing reference to youth and for greater attention to the god and goddess in question. Apollo is called 'the Cynthian' and 'unshorn' not because either is immediately relevant to the occasion, but because each adds a touch of variety, and Lato is brought in as the mother of Apollo and Diana and made more real by a mention of Jupiter's love for her, though it too is not strictly relevant. Horace enriches and embroiders where Catullus goes straight to the point, and the difference of approach is matched by the difference of versification. The lilt which makes Catullus' poem almost pure song is bound up with the simplicity of his thought; in Horace there is no such lilt because the thought is more elaborate, and the pleasure comes from the richness given to what might otherwise be a simple theme.

Horace's peculiar success is that he enriches his poems by countless small touches. While the strict form of the verse supplies such music as he needs, each word has a special appeal and charm, an ability to startle and delight through its expressiveness. It may often have taken Horace long to find the perfect word, but when it came, it did much more than carry its own burden of meaning in its own place. It is enthralling, uplifting, entirely satisfying. To secure this result Horace shaped his vocabulary to be not indeed so delicate or so subtle as that of Catullus, but more emphatic and more masculine and closer to that rhetoric into which Italians so often fall when their emotions are aroused. Less experimental than Virgil, who hardly ever says a plain thing in a plain way, Horace is still adventurous enough in his attempts to find a new liveliness through unusual combina-

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tions and figures of speech. Above all, his phrases give the impression that they are used for the first time and have not been dulled by habit and repetition. Their amazing aptness catches the attention at once and forces their meaning on us. Take, for instance, the opening lines of a poem on the first snow of the year :

Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte, nec iam sustineant onus
silvae laborantes, geluque
flumina constiterint acuto.

(I, 9, 1-4)

(Look, where Soracte rears his gleaming top
Snow-quilted, and the stricken woods
O'er loaded vail their boughs, the floods
By gripping frost constrained run slow and stop.)

(E. Marsh)

Each word not only goes straight to the point but is vivid and lively and brilliantly descriptive. *Stet* calls up the outline of the mountain as it stands solidly against the skyline ; the heavy *laborantes* conveys the straining effort in the woods with their unwonted burden of snow ; *acuto* is far more bold than its English counterpart and gives a sense of something that inflicts a piercing wound. And though each word has its own precision and distinction and delights us as it comes, the whole verse is not too crowded or too heavy. We pass lightly from one point to the next and see exactly what Horace wishes to convey. This is the secret of his art. His words, chosen with unflinching care and insight, are always fresh and alluring, and the result never looks laborious.

Horace's choice of individual words is matched by his skill in building them into sentences. Latin, of course, with its highly inflected forms, allows a far greater variety of word-order than is possible in English, but Horace's gift lies in exploiting to the utmost the possibilities of this variety. By separating his adjectives from their nouns, by placing the subject of a sentence not necessarily at the start but in some emphatic position where it will be more effective, by finding the right place for each word according to its relative importance, by weighing the worth of sounds and combining

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them in happy harmonies, Horace gives a new dimension to his poetry. His order is not that of natural speech, but though it is in some senses artificial, its artificiality makes it more telling. In this style nothing is idle, and every word not only has its own associations and individuality but gains much from its position. Take, for instance, the last stanza of his poem on the death of Cleopatra :

Deliberata morte ferocior
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens
privata deduci superbo
non humilis mulier triumpho.
(I, 37, 29-32)

(In calm deliberate death too proud
To freight Liburnian galleys, and be shown
In triumph fallen from her throne,
The mockery of a Roman crowd.)
(E. Marsh)

The tremendous final stroke in the last line comes largely from the contrast between the queen, 'no humble woman', and the hideous humiliation of being led in triumph before the mocking populace of Rome. The most important words are kept for this place, and what precedes them is calculated with that in mind. In the first line Cleopatra's violent and yet determined decision to kill herself appears in the antithesis of *deliberata* and *ferocior*. Then the reasons for this decision are unfolded, and we see that the great queen could never become a private citizen, *privata*, or yield her pride to the still greater pride of Rome. In such an art paragraphs stand with a special unity and independence, because they are so skilfully contrived and so intimately welded together. The weighty Latin words take on a new pride and splendour through this exploitation of their resources.

In this complex art surprise plays a considerable part. Just as in his selection of words Horace gives a continual delight by a succession of happy choices, so in the structure of a poem he keeps us intent and awake by the shifts of his moods and the unforeseen character of his development and his close. His models, Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon, do not usually do this, but tend to allow a single mood to

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dominate a poem. This is indeed the normal practice of lyric poetry, which aims at reflecting a single state of mind and needs no sudden changes or shocks or surprises. Horace, with his far less instinctive outlook, is unwilling to do this. He knew that in actual experience, as he felt it, one mood yields quickly to another, and his art reflects the wayward shifts of a subtle personality which starts with one view of a matter and then moves to another. For instance, when Virgil went to Greece, Horace wrote a poem wishing him a good voyage (I, 3). Such poems were common in antiquity and were expected to conform to certain rules. They must wish for fine weather, speak of the traveller's virtues, and try to dissuade him from going. Horace does all these things, but with an originality which almost gives them a new character. His poem has, as it were, three movements, each of which may be traced to the traditional rules. But in each Horace does something new. He begins with words of touching affection for his old friend, who is 'half his soul', and asks that he may be safely guided to Greece ; then, with a sudden twist, he speaks almost in reprobation of the bold exploits of men and deplores the dangers which they cause ; finally he closes not with a denunciation of this spirit but with resigned acceptance. The poem reflects Horace's changes of mood at his friend's departure. Horace often does this. It is not what we usually expect from lyrical poetry, but it is entirely consistent with his special art, in which variation of mood is allied to the cult of surprise.

By such means Horace gives variety and depth to his poetry, enriching it with many small touches which are outside the scope of pure song. But this was not his only way of making his poetry rich. He was fully aware of the mysteries and complexities of life and knew that things are not always what they seem. He wished to convey this sense of hidden depths, of unexplored secrets, of unrecognised qualities, and he found to hand an instrument of the greatest usefulness. In adopting the theology of the Greeks and equating it with their own somewhat shadowy Pantheon, the Romans added a great source of riches to their poetry. These gods and goddesses are hardly actual presences as they were to the Greeks ; they

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are symbols of real but indefinable and abstract powers. They can be used to express in concrete form ideas which are otherwise hard to convey because there are no adequate words for them. So Horace's Venus is less a goddess than a power of the flesh, who unaccountably attacks and masters him ; his Bacchus is not only the god of wine but the inspiring intoxication which creates poetry ; his Hercules is an example of that human spirit, admired by the Stoics, which is lord of itself and therefore of its destiny. So too the great array of Greek stories provided Horace with many significant examples to illustrate his thoughts. Instead of having to invent symbols and face all the difficulties which this implies, he found them ready for use, and with their aid was able to advance into many new realms.

Through this material Horace was able to stress the mystery which he found in certain subjects. Sometimes his original theme has been so transformed into symbols that we do not know what it was, but that does not spoil the effect. On the contrary, the universal character of the occasion emerges and becomes more significant by passing from history into poetry. For instance, Horace writes impressively of the rape of Helen by Paris and tells of the fearful catastrophes which will follow (1, 15). His words have an oracular dignity, and we may be right to assume that they were written for an urgent political crisis, perhaps in the years when it was becoming clear that Antony had finally broken with Octavian and would come to a disastrous end. But the actual occasion is transcended in the old myth, which is symbolical of all undertakings doomed to disaster because their leaders have in a frenzy of pride violated the laws and outraged the conscience of mankind. The Greek story and its characters are so familiar that the poem lives in its own right and can be related to any situation which contains elements of reckless effrontery and deserves disaster.

This art of symbolical suggestion can be put to quite personal ends. Horace's ode to Pyrrha (1, 5) is, on the face of it, addressed to a beautiful girl whose new lover does not know her character as Horace, from unfortunate experience, does. After a wonderful opening, which conjures up Pyrrha's

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studied air of artless simplicity, Horace builds his poem on a notable image. Pyrrha is as alluring and as inconstant as the sea. Her lover will weep for her changes of mood and faith, and wonder at the black gales sweeping across her, though now, in his ignorance of the treacherous wind, he thinks that she will always be calm and lovable. The poem closes with Horace's own experience of Pyrrha,—he has put votive-offerings in the sea-god's temple in gratitude for his escape from shipwreck. The whole is conceived with a charming imagination and derives much of its strength from the knowledge that Venus is herself a sea-goddess, who resembles the element of her birth in her alternations between magical, golden calm and sudden, savage storms. The Greek idea lives again in this symbolical application. Horace's Venus is not quite the Greek Aphrodite, but she is none the less real and her nature 'still has something of the sea'. The sustained imagery, derived from ancient belief and therefore immediately intelligible in all its range, heightens the tone of the poem and gives to it a peculiar charm and completeness.

Through this accomplished, civilised art Horace shows that he is aware of many sides of life. In him many contradictory elements met, and he was too sceptical and too sincere to try to resolve them into a single system. He was by birth and tastes a countryman, but he spent much of his time in Rome ; he was of quite humble origin, but circumstances made him a friend of Augustus and Maecenas and the new rulers of the world ; he fought in Brutus' army at Philippi, but later became a pillar of the new system. These contradictions in his circumstances were matched by others in himself. He was now a Stoic, now an Epicurean ; he both detested war, making fun of his own failure in it, and praised in noble words the martial achievements of Rome ; he was at once lax in his views on love and a champion of Augustus' legislation to improve sexual morality. Horace was fundamentally an ordinary man with an ordinary man's waywardness and instability on many issues. He understood the different moods of the human spirit so well that he gave to each an appropriate poetry which rings true in every word. His range is in consequence wider than that of the passionate

and fastidious Catullus. He used the lyric to treat many aspects of the life which he knew and to show what touching or exalting or ironical elements he found in it. Despite his air of a man of the world, his answer to any emotional or imaginative challenge was strong and sincere. He absorbed what came to him not merely with ready receptivity but with a welcome so eager and alert that it deserves the name of passion.

Horace covers so wide a range that at times he cannot but touch on light and even on trivial themes, but of course what matters is not their nature considered in abstraction but what he finds in them, and it is astonishing what Horace gets out of situations which might seem in themselves to lack interest. His poems on drinking are more than tributes to the delights of wine, and belong to the poetry of friendship, since they are nearly always concerned with the power of wine to release the affections. So, too, though not all his poems on love are inspired by a flame of pure passion, and some have even a perfunctory air, as if Horace pretended to be in love because it was expected of him, yet they have compensating virtues of charm and gaiety, like the delightful lines in which he protests to Chloe that she flees from him like a startled fawn and declares that he is no tiger in pursuit of her (I, 22); or the poem to Lydia, in which he declares his jealousy of her attentions to Telephus and then closes on a more serious note with his vision of what a constant affection ought to be (I, 13); or his poem to a 'daughter more beautiful than a beautiful mother', in which he playfully points out the error of quarrelling, apologises for his own rude words, and asks her to be his friend again (I, 16). Each situation is not only real and convincing but passes into poetry through flashes which illuminate it from all sides.

The serious, responsible side of Horace's character found its special field in Roman politics. These poems are usually longer than most of his odes, and the presence of six at the beginning of Book III proclaims the attention which Horace wishes to draw to them. In exalted words he presents thoughts which lay deep in the Roman mind. With fine enthusiasm he praises the traditional virtues of simplicity and sacrifice,

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devotion to duty and love of home. He crystallises his conclusions into short, pregnant sentences, as when he praises the worth of Roman breeding :

fortes creantur fortibus et bonis,
 . . . (IV, 4, 29)

(For good is born of good, and brave of brave,) (E. Marsh)

or the honour and joy of dying for one's country :

dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,
(III, 2, 13)

(How sweet his fame who for his country dies!)
(E. Marsh)

In these almost epigrammatic statements experience is refined and epitomised, and the marmoreal words reflect the Roman temper in its pride and its restraint, its self-confidence and its self-sacrifice. Emotion is kept under strict discipline, but is none the less powerfully at work.

Horace does not of course confine his utterances on public matters to these concise statements. He was much moved by the drama of Roman history and responded to it in his own time, when he exulted, perhaps too noisily, over the death of Cleopatra and showed that, like other Romans, he had been terrified of what this formidable woman might do to break the Roman dominion. He shared the old distrust of Carthage and even of the heroic Hannibal. If patriotism limited his sympathies and his outlook, as it limited Virgil's, it was because he believed that the enemies of Rome were the enemies of civilisation and of the way of life which he loved. For the Romans who defended their country's cause he has both praise and understanding, and admires the spirit in which they go uncomplaining to their doom, as Regulus goes to torture and death at the hands of the Carthaginians :

atqui sciebat quae sibi barbarus
tortor pararet: non aliter tamen
dimovit obstantes propinquos
et populum reditus morantem,

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quam si clientum longa negotia
diuudicata lite relinqueret,
tendens Venafranos in agros
aut Lacedaemonium Tarentum.

(III, 5, 49-56)

(Full well the Roman knew he should not lack
The thousand tortures of the Punic rack,
Yet through opposing kinsmen forced a way
And brushed aside the crowds that called him back,
As though, the court's last sentence given, he
From all the weary suits of clients free
Were leaving Rome for green Venafrum, or
Tarentum, Lacedaemon's colony.)

(H. Macnaghten)

The noble restraint in these words is matched by the remarkable imagery, so Roman in its inexorable sense of duty and so convincing in its juxtaposition of ghastly horrors and common routine. It was on chapters of history like this that Horace founded his philosophy of Rome and his vision of national endeavour.

In treating of his own feelings Horace found no need to exercise such restraint as he sometimes felt appropriate to public themes. On some topics he was not in the least shy, and his treatment of them throws a significant light on the workings of his genius. Some things so disturbed him that he could not but write about them with something akin to violence. If his sense of fitness was wounded, he felt a need to wound the offender in return, and this accounts for some poems, mistakenly condemned by modern taste, in which he attacks elderly women for labouring foolishly to look young. This outraged his feelings, and he countered with an unaccustomed sharpness, though his poetry is not for that reason the less powerful. At one time he mocks Lydia because she no longer has gallants to throng round her and throw stones at her window by night (I, 25). At another time he assails Lyce with words whose fierce exultation betrays some deeper emotion. He begins by rejoicing over her advancing years and sees in them the answer to his own prayers :

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Audivere, Lyce, di mea vota, di
audivere, Lyce ; fis anus, et tamen
vis formosa videri
ludisque et bibis impudens.
(IV, 13, 1-4)

(The gods, the gods have heard my prayer!
Yes, Lyce, you would still be fair,
And still, though old, you play
And drink, the shameless way.)
(H. Macnaghten)

But Horace is too human and too honest to keep the whole poem on this note, and it soon becomes clear that he derides Lyce because he has once been in love with her. The memory of this sweeps over him and makes him speak with uncommon passion :

quo fugit Venus, heu, quove color? decens
quo motus? quid habes illius, illius,
quae spirabat amores,
quae me surpuerat mihi?
(Ib. 17-20)

(Where is that hue, that beauty? Where
That gait? What trace of her, of her
Whose breath was love, who stole
From me my very soul?)
(H. Macnaghten)

The poem which began as a resentful attack becomes almost a lament and gathers a new strength through its pathos.

In these poems we may perhaps detect in Horace a real dislike of falling in love. He seems to have felt that it destroyed his calm and self-command and made him the plaything of uncontrollable forces. When he felt the approaches of passion, his first reaction seems to have been an uneasy distrust; then honesty would compel him to admit the truth, and he would break into an almost agonised sincerity. Such at least is the impression made by one of his poems to Ligurinus. He starts by saying that he is too old for the onslaughts of Venus, and tries to laugh off the occasion by telling her to visit one of his friends. Then he

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takes one of his sudden turns, speaks with startling candour, and closes by lamenting his helplessness and frustration :

sed cur, heu, Ligurine, cur
manat rara meas lacrima per genas ?
cur facunda parum decoro
inter verba cadit lingua silentio ?

nocturnis ego somniis
iam captum teneo, iam volucrem sequor
te per gramina Martii
campi, te per aquas, dure, volubiles.
(IV, I, 33-40)

(But yet — but yet — ah, Ligurinus, why
Do these slow tears run down my cheek ?
Why does my voice in sullen silence break
To shame my wit, and in mid-sally die ?

Still in the visions of the night
I clasp thee, still the lovely phantom fades
Over the plains and tides in mocking flight,
Still my pursuing arms evades.)

(E. Marsh)

In another poem addressed to Ligurinus (IV, 10) Horace seems by an extraordinary paradox to say one thing and to mean another. He warns Ligurinus that he will soon lose his beauty and bitterly regret that he has not taken full advantage of his youth. But this warning is not cruel or triumphant; it breathes a deep compassion, almost a tragic sense of the brevity of youth and its chances. It passes beyond its immediate purpose into the poetry of grief for lost opportunities.

The theme of death is closely allied to these themes of love and perishing beauty and affected Horace even more deeply. It, too, broke into his ordered routine and left him anxious and afraid. The reality of death seems to have been brought home to him by the falling bough of an elm-tree which nearly killed him, and though this may not account for everything, there is no doubt of the strength of Horace's feelings. With a remarkably visual imagination he asks what death really means. He looks all round the subject and

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marks now this aspect, now that. He recalls Greek myths of Styx and Tartarus, of sinners condemned to everlasting punishment, of Cerberus and the Furies. He covers a whole range of thoughts which men have formed about death in the hope of understanding it, and knows that it comes alike to rich and poor, that it forbids us to indulge hopes, that it means the loss not only of earth and home and wife, but even of the trees which we have loved, that not even Orpheus' song can give life to the unsubstantial ghosts. Nor is it merely the future which is dark and menacing. The constant threat of death destroys the reality of life and makes nonsense of our fears no less than of our desires, of our escapes no less than of our disasters :

frustra cruento Marte carebimus
fractisque rauci fluctibus Hadriae,
frustra per autumnos nocentem
corporibus metuemus Austrum.

(II, 14, 13-16)

(In vain we shun the shafts of Mars,
Or reefs and races of the Hadrian tide,
Or far from dreaded Auster's region bide,
Who breathes his poison under autumn stars.)

(E. Marsh)

Death undermines our confidence in life by showing that in the end everything is equally futile before the final darkness.

Yet though this anxiety is never very far from Horace's thoughts, and though it inspires some of his finest verse, it is usually no more than a background, if it is even so much as that. Against his doubts and his fears Horace sets his positive vision of life, of the joys to be snatched from the fleeting hour, of friendships and devotions which bring contentment and confidence. He does not ask for too much, and his Epicureanism is always wise and moderate. He knows that quiet pleasures are the most satisfying, and his special gift is for a poetry of unrenowned activities. It is perhaps true that a gentle, resigned melancholy released his creative powers in a special degree and that his most characteristic utterance is in such a poem as *Diffugere nives* (IV, 7), where the coming of spring turns his thoughts to the cycle of the seasons and the

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shortness of life. Yet in this there is no real note of complaint, still less of self-pity. It is true and courageous and has no quarrel with the universe. Horace seems to say that this is what life is and that it is foolish to wish it otherwise. This sanity informs his poetry and gives it a special flavour. The miracle is that the sanity has passed into poetry so fine and so sustained that the four books of the Odes, with their hundred and three short poems, cover a wider range of experience and present it in a more satisfying form than almost any other comparable book written by man.

III

'THE KNIGHT IN THE TIGER'S SKIN'

IT is notoriously dangerous to write about the poetry of a language which one does not know. Translations, even the best, are bound to be inadequate, if not misleading, and, since the essential impact of poetry comes from its individual use of words, it is obviously impossible to pass critical judgments on poems which we cannot read in their original tongue. Yet sometimes the temptation is too strong to resist. In the history of literature the contents and outlook of a poem may have their own interest and appeal, and if we cannot read it, as we should like, in its right form, we must fall back on translations. With lyrical poetry this is too often unsatisfactory, but there is more to be said for it with narrative. Here we can at least judge the character of the story and the manner of its telling, see how the whole is planned and constructed, and divine something of the poet's personal convictions. Such an activity is not criticism in the strict sense but a study of literary material and thought, and though in this the critic may not exercise his judicial function, he can still learn something about the history of ideas and their artistic presentation. The case for such study is more powerful when the poem is written in a language which is hardly known in Great Britain, as is *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, written in Georgian by Shot'ha Rust'hveli. It has been translated into English prose¹ and Russian verse,² and in these alien disguises it is still so arresting and raises so many fascinating issues that it deserves attention, even though we cannot enjoy the many felicities of language which its admirers claim for it and which help to explain why for over seven centuries the

¹ *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, translated by Marjory Wardrop. Moscow, 1938. I have used this for quotations from the poem.
² *Vityaz v Tigrovoi Shkure*, Perevod Shalba Nutsubidze, Moscow, 1941.

Georgians have regarded it as the classical masterpiece of their national literature.

Of Rust'hveli himself we know almost nothing. Nor is this surprising, since the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century and the later depredations of Tamerlane did irreparable harm in Georgia and destroyed many monuments of its literary past. About all that we can say is that Rust'hveli lived in the latter part of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. Since he dedicates his poem in words of romantic eulogy to Queen T'hamar and indicates that she commanded him to write it, he was probably connected with the court. He was certainly very well educated not only in the traditional stories of his own land, but in the more advanced poetry of Persia and the current philosophy of his time. His reading was indeed wider than he admits. A mention in his Introduction of two kinds of lovers (22) is a direct reference to two poems by the Persian Nizami, *Laila and Majnun* and *Bahram Gur*, and a neat quotation from Plato (770) comes from a wide range of study. Rust'hveli is known to have written other works, notably a romance, *Joseph the Magnificent*, and a poem, *Eulogies*, but neither of these has survived. What survives and matters is *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, an epic in some 6500 lines, written in quatrains, each of which rhymes throughout on a single sound on the principle *a a a a*, an achievement which is said to be as difficult in Georgian as in most other languages, especially as only double and triple rhymes are used. The date of the poem can be fixed with some confidence between certain limits. Since Rust'hveli refers to Nizami's *Bahram Gur*, which was written in 1196, this gives a *terminus a quo*, while a *terminus ad quern* may be provided by the poet's silence about the elevation of Queen T'hamar's son, Lasha-Georgi, to be co-ruler with her in 1207, since, if the appointment had already been made, Rust'hveli would surely have associated him with his mother in the dedication. We may, therefore, date *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* at the turn of the century, between 1198 and 1207. It was a time of busy creativeness in many countries, and remote Georgia made its own unique contribution to the literary scene.

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At this time, both in Europe and in Asia, poetry was passing through a remarkable change. The epic was the order of the day, but, though it still told of heroic deeds and high adventures, it was changing its tone and spirit. Its chief subject, which had been honour and the pursuit of glory, was gradually being transfused by a new notion of romantic love, in which heroes did everything for some mistress whom they adored with passion, even if they had never seen her. This theme is already present in the *Nibelungenlied*, which was composed in the Danube region about 1200, and is far more actively present in the French epics, which at this period abandoned the heroic splendours of the *Song of Roland* for the sentiment and fancy of poems like *Guingamor*. So, too, in Asia, where Persia led the van in poetry, Nizami (1140-1202) told his romantic tales about heroic lovers and even took famous themes from Firdausi and gave to them a new character through his treatment of love. Behind the epic poets of both Europe and Asia lay a social background in which love had become a popular theme in courts and great houses, and this love, whether treated by Arnaut Daniel or Pietro della Vigna or Wolfram von Eschenbach or the Moorish poets of Southern Spain, had some sort of ideal character. The beloved was seen as an incarnation of all virtues and worthy to be served with utter selflessness and self-sacrifice. Such was the spirit of the age, and from it *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* was born.

In 1221 the Mongols invaded Georgia and conquered part of it, and from this date its decline began. But before this it had for over a century enjoyed a remarkable expansion of spirit and enterprise in philosophy and the arts, to which various forces from different sides contributed. On the one hand poetry came from Persia and was translated into Georgian, including parts of Firdausi's *Shah-nameh* and more recent poems, of which the most important were Nizami's *Laila and Majnun* and *Khusrau and Shirin*. On the other hand the Byzantine Empire, which had not yet been ruined by the rapacity of the Crusaders, provided an influential selection of works approved by the neo-Hellenic revival. Though parts of Homer were translated into

Georgian in 1125, the chief debt to Byzantium was in philosophy. Works of neo-Platonist philosophers such as Proclus, Porphyry, Aeneas of Gaza, and the pseudo-Dionysius, were made known through Georgian scholars, like Johannes Petritzes, who studied at Constantinople. Different though Greek philosophy and Persian poetry are, they combined to promote two important conceptions. First, the Persian poems, with their Moslem background, united with Greek Platonism to encourage a stricter and more abstract monotheism than was in practice encouraged by the Eastern Church. Secondly, the occupation of Persian poets with romantic love found sufficient support in neo-Platonism to provide an intellectual foundation for what they treated with an abundant imagination. Rust'hveli was deeply touched by both of these movements and owes to them much that is most striking in his poem

The Knight in the Tiger's Skin is a well conceived and well constructed story, which turns round four main and several subsidiary characters. The two heroes, Avt'handil and Tariel, are in love respectively with T'hinat'hin and Nestan. Into Avt'handil's world Tariel makes a sudden, sensational incursion, and then no less suddenly disappears. T'hinat'hin sends Avt'handil to find him. He succeeds, and many adventures follow, when the two warriors seek for the lost Nestan, who has been abducted and left no trace of her whereabouts. In the end she is found and rescued, and, with a few more feats of valour to round it off, the story ends. Into this main structure the poet inserts Tariel's own account of his previous life, his love for Nestan, and her strange disappearance, and in so doing uses a device which is as old as *Gilgamish* and the *Odyssey* and has been much favoured by epic poets whether oral or literary. The action of the poem develops with its own logic, which follows, it must be admitted, unusual rules, but is none the less convincing and dramatic. Though T'hinat'hin is less prominent than Nestan, she has a big enough part, if only because she inspires Avt'handil to his heroic exploits. If the poem has a single hero, it is Tariel. At least Rust'hveli closes the poem by saying that as others have praised the great heroes of

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Georgian legend, Amiran, Abdul-Mesia, and Dilarget'h,¹ so he has praised Tariel 'for whom his tear unceasing flows' (1631), but since Avt'handil is associated with Tariel as his incomparable friend and partner in most of his exploits, he is hardly less important. The two form a heroic pair in the traditional style, and if one is the more dominant, the other is no less admirable. The poem is not built round a single character, but has a single plot in which various characters are brought together in a unifying pattern.

In his dedication to Queen T'hamar Rust'hveli presents a manifesto on the art of poetry. After announcing that 'minstrelsy is a branch of wisdom' (12), he goes on to compare the long poem with the short and to show his preference for it on three accounts : first, anyone can compose a few verse's, but it takes real talent to compose on a large scale ; secondly, lyrics 'cannot command heart-piercing words' but are like the 'bad bows of young hunters who cannot kill big game' (16); thirdly, they are 'pleasantries for comrades'. What he desires is something more serious, and for this the long poem is the only adequate medium. Such an aim is characteristic of the age, whether in the East or the West, in both of which poets composed on a generous scale and built their tales of high adventures on certain convictions and principles. That Rust'hveli should tell of heroic exploits is natural enough, since they were much to the taste of his time and his people and had a long poetical history behind them. It is no less natural that he should write a long poem, since for the preceding century Georgian poets had been doing this, and behind them lay a tradition of that oral poetical narrative which tends to extend its scope as it matures. But when he defends the long poem against the short, he speaks for the popular tradition against the courtly, for the *chanson de geste* against the *chanson d'amour*, and shows that in Georgia, as in France and Germany, there was some rivalry between the two kinds and that he himself prefers the *chanson de geste*, because it speaks for a wider circle and has a much more comprehensive character.

¹ The stories of these three heroes had been told in the century before Rust'hveli by three Georgian poets respectively, Mose Khoneli, Shavt'heli, and T'hmogveli.

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Rust'hveli, however, does not tell his story just for its own sake. He explains at some length that he loves Queen T'hamar and is inspired to write by this love. He does not intend to praise her directly :

Now let all know that I praise her whom I erstwhile praised ; in this I have great glory, I feel no shame. She is my life ; merciless as a leopard is she. Her name I pronounce hereafter praising her allegorically. (19)

Though the poem says nothing directly about T'hamar, it reflects Rust'hveli's feelings for her and presents them in a secondary or 'allegorical' form. It is in fact a dramatisation of them into a heroic medium, the expression of his love through a story which tells of love at the highest level. We are inevitably reminded of Dante, and though Rust'hveli differs from Dante in excluding his lady from his story, he might well agree with him that he is one who listens when love prompts and puts his thoughts into words as love dictates (*Purg.* xxiv, 52-4). Both poems advance from the ideal love of a single woman to a vast scheme of narrative, and though Rust'hveli's world is more circumscribed than Dante's, its concentration on the theme of love is greater and holds it more closely together.

Rust'hveli's conception of love may well have sounded strange to some of his contemporaries, and that perhaps is why he takes trouble to explain it. He begins with a general statement:

I speak of the highest love — divine in its kind. It is difficult to discourse thereon, ill to tell forth with tongues. It is heavenly, upraising the soul on pinions. Whoever strives thereafter must indeed have endurance of many griefs. (20)

The Platonic note is already manifest, and as we read on, we see how fully Rust'hveli has absorbed the Platonic point of view. We see also how this is supplemented by other ideas which are consistent with it, even if not strictly Platonic, and recall the cult of love in other countries. First, Rust'hveli reminds us more than once of Provençal poets like Arnaut Daniel and Jaufré Rudel. Though he claims to speak only of the 'lower frenzies' because the tongue will tire of speaking

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of 'that one love' (21), it is clear that even these make their demands and exact a noble code of conduct. He lays down that a lover must have wisdom, generosity, youth, and leisure (23); that he must be 'constant, not lewd, impure and faithless' (25); that he must keep his secret to himself and fear the wrath of his beloved (27); that 'for her sake he looks upon sorrow as joy, for her sake he would willingly be burned' (28). Such a doctrine would almost appeal to Dante. But Rust'hveli goes further than this when he sketches how the lover should behave :

There is a noblest love ; it does not show, but hides its woes ; the lover thinks of it when he is alone, and always seeks solitude ; his fainting, dying, burning, flaming, all are from afar ; he must face the wrath of his beloved, and he must be fearful of her. (27)

The nearest parallel to this can be found in the poets of Moorish Spain, like Ibn Zaydiin, who writes to the Princess Wallada :

Load my heart with what anyone else would find insupportable, and I shall bear it. Order and I will obey. Be haughty and I will humble myself.¹

It is almost impossible to say where Rust'hveli found his notions. Greek Platonism was certainly one source; poetry, perhaps of Arabian origin but filtered through Persia, another. But we cannot exclude the possibility that some of his ideas were his own and that he came to conclusions similar to those reached by poets elsewhere. He does far more than obey fashion in making love the chief theme of his poem. He has given great thought to it and combined in a single theory strands which may have travelled far before he picked them up in Georgia.

What Rust'hveli means by love is presented concretely and dramatically in the relations between his different characters. At the highest level is Taniel's love for Nestan, which dominates his life. He not only conquers the Chinese just because she so commands him, but does not shrink from killing on her instructions the prince whom her father wishes

¹ G. Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People*, p. 25.

her to marry. In her presence he is filled with uncontrollable emotions. Any small gift from her he treasures as a sacred relic. When he loses her, he longs to die, bursts into tears or swoons at the mention or thought of her, seeks solitude to solace his woes, and moves heaven and earth to regain her. Avt'handil's love for T'hinhat'hin is of the same kind, though it is not quite so sorely tested. Yet for her he does not hesitate to undertake hard and perilous tasks like the search for Tariel and the rescue of Nestan. In return both women love their men with a devotion no less single and exalted. If they impose almost impossible duties upon them, it is because they believe in their capacity to carry them out, and if they are at times remote and proud, it is because pride lies at the root of the honour for which they live. No less powerful in its own way than these devotions between men and women is the friendship between Avt'handil and Tariel. Almost as soon as they meet, they feel that they are brothers, and for this Avt'handil breaks his allegiance to his king and spares himself nothing to keep his promises to Tariel. Between them there is no rift, and each sustains the other in their perilous undertakings. In this world even inferiors and servants are capable of passionate loyalties, like that of the slave Asmat'h for Nestan, and later for Tariel in his search for her, or that of the gay merchant's wife, P'hatman, for Nestan and, in its peculiar way, for Avt'handil, with whom she falls in love and whom she continues to help even when she knows that he does not and will not love her. *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* is built on a system of passionate devotions and loyalties, and love in some form or another is seldom absent from its pages.

The predominant part given to love justifies us in calling the poem a romance, since this is one of the most important respects in which romance differs from truly heroic poetry, which is concerned with honour and renown. If we compare *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* with poetical romances, both Eastern and Western, which belong to the same age, we can see many points of resemblance. The total devotion of the two chief heroes to one another, their courageous undertaking of seemingly impossible quests, the large part played by

battles, the vivid evocation of natural scenes, especially when they are remote and solitary, the long journeys over vast deserts or difficult seas, the general sense of wealth and display and generous hospitality, all belong to the world of romance, wherever it appears, and speak for the courtly and civilised society which inspired this kind of poetry. It called for an art to give dignity and colour to the human state and provide a contrast to the rough age of personal adventures which lay in a not too distant past and was still recalled in popular song. In all this Rust'hveli conforms to type and presents many interesting points of comparison. But what is more instructive is where he differs from the normal form and goes his own way. For then we see how original he is and how true to his own ideas and consistent in their presentation through poetry.

First, *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* is dominated by the author's conception of love as almost no other poetical romance is. This is not merely to say that love appears more often in it than, for example, in the *Nibelungenlied* or even than in *Guineamor*; it is rather that love provides both the structure and the outlook of the poem. Almost everything turns on it, and it is never incidental or supplementary. This is the more remarkable when we remember how much attention was paid to love by French poets of the twelfth century and still more by Persians like Nizami. Yet though the early poems on the Arthurian legend provide in Tristan and Iseult or Lancelot and Guinevere loves which are not only chivalrous and passionate but even tragic, the poems about them do not present whole worlds of the imagination in which love is the main motive of action. In them it is something still rather exceptional and wonderful and therefore worthy of honour, but it is not a complete system of life. Still less does it spread its influence to friendships like that of Tariel and Avt'handil. It is true that *Garrin le Loherian* tells of a great friendship between two heroes which turns to enmity, but at no stage has it the intensity of the friendship between Tariel and Avt'handil. Even in Nizami's *Laila and Majnun* and *Khusrau and Shirln*, which tell of powerful passions and high adventures, there is nothing resembling

Rust'hveli's thoroughness and consistency in making love the inspiration and the school of manhood. Rust'hveli's originality lies in treating love not as something abnormal but as a force which gets the best out of those whom it rules and provides a code of behaviour at different levels for different kinds of men and women.

Secondly, though *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* is a romance, it is surprisingly lacking in one element which permeates nearly all other romance,—the supernatural. This is present even in the *Nibelungenlied*, where Siegfried's cap of darkness plays an important part in the winning of Brynhild. It is far more present in French poetry. Even *Huon de Bordeaux*, which begins with a purely heroic story, ends with a trip to carry off the daughter of the Admiral of Babylon, in which many kinds of magic play their part; and poems like *Guingamor* or the Dutch version of the tale of Gawain, *Walewein*, move freely and easily in a world of wonders. Much the same may be said of Nizami. Even when he takes up the story of Alexander, which is derived ultimately from Firdausi's *Shah-nameh*, he allows himself great liberties in making the hero perform and witness wonders, especially when they are worked by his philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Nizami, it is true, has his own elaborate philosophy in which love plays a considerable part, but he drives home his conclusions in a series of episodes in which the laws of nature are suspended or replaced by other laws known only to the wise. Rust'hveli, however, allows no such licence. What his heroes and heroines do is indeed remarkable and far beyond the reach of ordinary men and women, but it is none the less possible, and in it magic plays no part. In this respect Rust'hveli is almost realistic. The world of his invention is very unfamiliar, but we can imagine that in certain not impossible conditions human beings might act like this.

Thirdly, if we compare Rust'hveli with the writers of French romance, his sense of reality is revealed in a different way. Here the comparison is between his robust feeling for humanity and their tendency to let everything turn into abstraction and allegory. It is true that Rust'hveli calls his poem 'allegorical', but he treats his themes so firmly that we

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never look for another meaning behind the immediate presentation. But in French romance allegory too often takes the stage and never leaves it. The classic example of this is the *Roman de la rose* of Guillaume de Lorris, in which human qualities and aspects take the place of characters and act as if they were persons. It is a subtle and ingenious art, and shows considerable insight into human nature, but it is not solid and four-square in the way that Rust'hveli's is. It is one thing to break up a person into pieces, to give to each a proper name, and to treat it as a single character, and another thing to combine such qualities in a single character and show how they work together in him. Though French romance loves unusual adventures, and is in this respect close to *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, its desire to probe the self forces it into a technique which is far removed from the traditional manner of chronicling events. It has its own level of reality, but Rust'hveli's characters are, despite their remarkable idiosyncrasies, nearer to human beings as we normally think about them.

Nearly three centuries after the completion of *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* poetical romance attained a remarkable accomplishment in Italy with the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto. Here, too, we might expect to find points of resemblance with Rust'hveli, and so we may in the cult of love and the heroic actions of the characters. But there the resemblance ends. In these delightful and brilliant stories there is an air of deliberate fancy which is quite alien to Rust'hveli's prevailing seriousness. The Italian poets look upon romance as an escape from reality to a world of dream, and what delights them is precisely this element of unreality, which allows their characters to do the most astonishing things in defiance of natural laws. Italian romance moves in a world of pure art, where men have no responsibilities or obligations beyond a fantastic sense of honour, which is itself not taken too seriously. So, too, in Asia at about the same time, when the Usbek poet, Alisher Navoï (1441-1501), wrote romances like *Farhad and Shirin*, he does indeed attach much importance to love and gives it a prominent place in his story, but his action often moves at an unreal level and his hero

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thinks nothing of fighting dragons or taking on Ahriman in single combat. This is a world of high romance, and it is far removed from the solidity and seriousness of Rust'hveli.

Rust'hveli's independence and originality are clear enough. It is, therefore, the more remarkable that, since he clearly knew Persian poetry and developed a manner different from it, he should in his Introduction make a statement which implies the exact contrary :

This Persian tale, now done into Georgian, has hitherto been like a pearl of great price cast in play from hand to hand ; now I have found it and mounted it in a setting of verse ; I have done a praise-worthy deed. The ravisher of my reason, proud and beautiful, willed me to do it. (9)

If we are to believe this, Rust'hveli has taken a traditional Persian story and, at the command of Queen T'hamar, put it into Georgian verse. The passage has been denounced as an interpolation, but it is hard to see why anyone should have interpolated it. On the other hand we may doubt if it means quite what it says. Persian literature has nothing to say of Tariel and the other figures of *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*, and indeed none of them has been identified outside Georgia. This is the more remarkable since Persian stories were immensely popular in Asia and spread to many distant peoples, including the Uzbeks, the Ossetes, and the Yakuts. It seems odd that if Rust'hveli's subject were of Persian origin, it should have left no traces of this anywhere. In fact it is more likely that when he calls his poem a 'Persian tale', he means that it is in the Persian taste, civilised and highly wrought, concerned with love and adventure, and rich in the vivid imagery in which Persian poetry delighted. Persia was the great cultural power of his time, and Rust'hveli wished to show how aware he was of the latest movements in art; so he claims that his poem is Persian. Once he has done this and established his literary credentials, Rust'hveli writes what is throughout a Georgian poem. He has nothing good to say of the Persians, who were after all Moslems, while the Georgians were Christians. The one Persian character in the poem, the prince Khvarazmsha, comes to a hideous end, while the heroes speak of the Persians with such sentiments

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as 'I could never let India be food for the Persians' or 'This shall not be said, that the Persians hold sway in our court'. That Rust'hveli learned much from Persian poetry is indubitable, but that does not mean that either his subject or his handling of it are of Persian origin.

Rust'hveli's independence of Persia and indeed of the whole Islamic world can be seen in one or two important respects. First, the women of *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* clearly belong to a society which knows nothing of the harem or purdah. Rust'hveli, writing at a time when a woman, to whom he was deeply attached, was on the throne, makes women the equals of men, if not in some sense their superiors. Not only does he lay down the principle that 'the lion's whelps are equal, be they male or female', but he goes out of his way to show the two sexes mixing on equal terms. The heroes see their women alone in their bowers or chambers without resorting to clandestine subterfuge. Nestan, T'hinat'hin, Asmat'h, and P'hatman are not cloistered and isolated prisoners of women's quarters but take an active part in public life and go freely where they wish. This surely reflects the Georgian practice of Rust'hveli's own day, and helps to explain why the cult of ideal love was able to attain such remarkable proportions. Secondly, though Rust'hveli sets his action on a vast stage which includes India, Arabia, and China, and though he does not mention Georgia by name, he has none the less his own exalted patriotism. When Nestan, imprisoned in a remote fortress, thinks that all hope of freedom is lost, she writes what she believes to be her last letter before death, and in it tells Tariel to serve their country, as if this were the highest duty she could imagine at so grave a moment (1283). Rust'hveli was a conscious patriot at a time when his country was still free and prosperous, and his belief in the heroic virtues was attached to his love of it, even though he places his action in the vast expanses of Asia.

The Knight in the Tiger's Skin is a Georgian work, which looks both to the east and the west and yet keeps its national character. Above all the cult of ideal love had been acclimatised and accommodated to a special heroic outlook. The

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whole system is worked out with care and consistency, but though it is clear what Rust'hveli means, his views are so remote from modern thought that we may find it difficult to grasp them in their entirety. Of course we find the same problem with Provençal poetry and even with Dante, but Rust'hveli poses it more emphatically, since he relates his philosophy very closely to action. That his imaginary world is derived from his own experience we cannot doubt. We must take him at his word and believe that in his own life he knew something like the ideal, passionate love which he attributes to his heroes. This is in no way inconsistent with the view that such love was a courtly cult in Georgia and may have developed many artificial conventions. It is characteristic of a great poet that he treats such cults seriously and discovers what elements of truth and reality are concealed in them. We can no more distrust Rust'hveli's account of himself than we can distrust Dante's. That love can take such forms is clear from poets so different as the Mantuan Sordello and the Persian Hafiz. If we wish to pierce behind the cult and what Rust'hveli makes of it, we may well consider its religious background. In the twelfth century, Georgian philosophers, under Greek influence, were trying to find a deeper meaning than the Church provided for their traditional faith. They seem to have taken the Christian conception of love and asked what it meant in its purest form, and the answer was not charity, of which, after all, the neo-Platonists say next to nothing, but the exalted love of an individual. To this they gave their devotion, and in it they found a principle of action which inspired noble natures and demanded extraordinary sacrifices. A belief so exalted could not but make a great appeal if it made any appeal at all, and we may assume that for Rust'hveli it had a religious solemnity.

Such a view is as old as Plato, and though it may be combined with Christianity, it can also exist independently of it. Though Rust'hveli lived in a Christian country and despised Moslems, he never once mentions Christ or specifically Christian dogmas as such. In later times this was noted and held against him in Georgia, as when in the fourteenth

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century one pious author warns readers that Rust'hveli never mentions the Trinity and that to read him is to imperil one's soul. Rust'hveli indeed is very near to being a pantheist. At least he looks upon the sun as an emanation of God, which gives to men some of its own splendour. So in what she believes to be her last letter Nestan writes to Tariel:

* Entreat God for me ; it may be He will deliver me from the travail of the world and from the union with fire, water, earth, and air. Let Him give me wings and I shall fly up, I shall attain my desire — day and night I shall gaze on the sun's rays flashing in splendour.

'The sun cannot be without thee, for thou art an atom of it; of a surety thou shalt adhere to it as its zodiac, and not as one rejected. There shall I seek thee ; I shall liken thee to it, thou shalt enlighten my darkened heart. If my life was bitter, let my death be sweet!' (1280-1)

If the sun is the source of life and being, it is also the source of strength, which sustains men in their manifold endeavours. So when he leaves Tariel, Avt'handil prays to it:

'O Sun, to thee, I pray, thou mighty of the mightiest mights, who exaltest the humble, givest sovereignty, happiness ; part me not from my beloved, turn not my day to night!' (937)

He follows this with prayers to the five planets and the moon, asking each to aid him in his task. This is not primitive nature-worship. The sun, as the source of light, is the symbol of light and strength for the soul. Such a belief is in no sense Christian, and Rust'hveli's forerunners in it are to be found not in the Fathers of the Church but in Julian the Apostate and his philosophers. Rust'hveli indeed makes some attempt to bring this notion into line with Christianity when he makes Avt'handil write to King Rostevan, whom he leaves secretly against orders :

'Thou hast read how the apostles write of love, how they speak of it, how they praise it; know thou it and harmonise thy knowledge : "love exalteth us", this is as it were the tinkling burden of their song ; if thou conceive not this, how can I convince ignorant men ?

'He who created me, even He gave me power to overcome foes ; He who is the invisible Might, the Aid of every earthly being, who fixes the bounds of the finite, sits immortal God as God, He can in

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one moment change a hundred into one and one into a hundred.'
(772-3)

Rust'hveli's God is a source of power, who sets it to work through the capacity for love which He plants in the hearts of men.

With this remarkable philosophy Rust'hveli infuses his poem. He assumes that brave deeds are the right occupation for men, and he describes them in a way which illustrates his philosophy without detracting from their human and dramatic interest. Indeed we may suspect that he takes his material not from courtly poetry, like that of Persia, but from oral tradition. 'The pearl of great price cast in play from hand to hand', of which he speaks, must surely be an ancient, heroic tale, which he transforms through his new, dominating outlook. That, perhaps, is why he uses certain common themes of heroic poetry, and gives to them a new character. For instance, we are familiar with pairs of heroes, like Achilles and Patroclus, Gilgamish and Enkidu, Roland and Oliver, who are bound by indissoluble loyalties and share all dangers and glories. Taniel and Avt'handil are such a pair. Their friendship begins, if not with an actual fight like that of Gilgamish and Enkidu, at least with something close to it, when Taniel suddenly appears and kills the slaves whom Avt'handil's master, Rostevan, sends to ask who he is. When Avt'handil goes in search of him, it is a dangerous quest, since he does not know how Taniel will receive him. He tracks him to his cave, where he finds the faithful retainer, Asmat'h, and persuades her to help him. She prepares the way with Taniel, and when Avt'handil discloses his presence, all goes well, because each recognises in the other a man of his own metal, the kind of comrade with whom he can share everything on equal terms. It is an occasion of uninhibited emotion:

Taniel met him. They were both fit to be ranked as suns, or as the moon in the heaven, spreading her rays on the plain beneath. Compared with them the aloe-tree was of no worth ; they were like the seven planets ; to what else can I liken them ?

They kissed each other, they were not bashful at being strangers ; they opened the rose, from their lips their white teeth shone trans-

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parent. They embraced each other's neck, together they wept; their jacinth, which was worth rubies, they turned into amber. (275-6)

This friendship, once formed, is broken by no disagreement but strengthened by mutual loyalty. Avt'handil is as eager to find Nestan as Tariel himself is, and as energetic and resourceful in the quest. But this friendship is coloured by a strong element of romantic devotion. Avt'handil sees in Tariel 'a brother by a tie stronger than brotherhood' and pleads this as an excuse to his king for going in search of him. In the same way, when Tariel fears that he may be thought to have betrayed a promise to Avt'handil, he disclaims the charge with passion :

'Brother, I was not false to thee, I have done what I swore to thee ; unperturbed from my soul I have seen thee, thus have I kept my vow.'
(853)

Tariel and Avt'handil give to each other a devotion equal in strength to what they give to Nestan and T'hinat'hin. In sharing their ideal loves for women they almost feel something of the same kind for each other. Once a hero begins to live in this world, its spirit penetrates his whole life and outlook.

Another traditional theme of heroic poetry is that of the faithful servant who remains true to his or her master even when everyone else is faithless. Such are the swineherd, Eumaeus, and the old house-woman, Euryclea, in the *Odyssey*, and such is Asmat'h in *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin*. When she first appears, she is Nestan's confidential slave. She brings her mistress's messages to Tariel and guides him to her presence. When Nestan is abducted, she tells Tariel and is at first so broken that she can hardly speak or say more than 'God has engirt the sphere of the heavens in wrath for us' (553). She knows what the news will mean to Tariel and is quite prepared for him to kill her. When he shows no hostility but regards her as a possible ally in the search for Nestan, she gives to him a service equal to that which she has given to her mistress. She stays with him, accompanies him on his wanderings, and becomes his sole companion in the lonely cave where Avt'handil finds him. It is she who arranges things so skilfully that Avt'handil and

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Tariel at once become friends, and who, when the two heroes leave her, laments their departure with bitter tears :

'O lions! whose tongues can chant lamentations for you! The sun has turned and consumed you, heavenly stars ! Alas for my woes so great! Alas the sufferings of life!' (924)

In their final adventure Asmat'h accompanies the, heroes, and throughout, though she is a slave, she is treated with great courtesy and consideration and even affection. She is quite as intimate with Tariel as Euryclea or Eumaeus is with Odysseus or Telemachus, and though she belongs to the traditional class of faithful servants and behaves as such a person should, she too speaks in the language of exalted love and follows Tariel with unflinching loyalty because he loves her mistress.

A similar transformation of heroic themes can be seen in other subsidiary episodes. Heroes, for instance, commonly kill wild beasts, such as lions and tigers. The Armenian, Mher the Elder, provides a good example. A lion is ravaging the flocks of his people, and he destroys it in a delightfully nonchalant manner :

With one hand on the lion's upper jaw,
With the other on its lower,
Mher grasped it, tore it in half,
Tore the lion in two pieces ;
The left piece he threw to the left,
The right piece he threw to the right.¹

This is the right way for a hero to destroy a wild beast in a heroic world. With Tariel the situation is more complicated. When he makes his first appearance, he wears a tiger-skin, and this prepares the way for a later episode. When Avt'handil comes back to Tariel and fails to find him in the cave, he eventually sees him outside at the point of death after killing a lion and a tiger. He revives and tells what has happened, and his story is characteristic of Rust'hveli's Platonic outlook, though it is transposed to an unusual setting. Unable to wait any longer in the cave, Tariel has gone out and seen a lion and a tiger. At first he is delighted by them

¹ *David Sasunskii* (Moscow, 1939), p. 109.

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and feels sympathy for them, because they seem to be enamoured. Then things take a different turn :

'First they sported gladly, then they quarrelled fiercely; each struck the other with its paw, they had no fear of death ; the tiger lost heart, even as women do ; the lion fiercely pursued, none could have calmed him. '

'The 'behaviour of the lion displeased me. I said " Thou art out of thy wits. Why annoy'st thou thy beloved ? Fie on such bravery ! " I rushed on him with my bared sword, I gave him to be pierced by the spear, I struck his head, I killed him, I freed him from this world's woe.

'I threw away my sword, I leaped down, I caught the tiger with my hands, I wished to kiss it for the sake of her for whom hot fires burn me. It roared at me and worried me with its blood-shedding paws. I could hear no more ; with enraged heart I killed it too.' (889-91)

Even when dealing with wild animals Tariel is true to his convictions and his guiding passion. He does what primitive heroes do quite as well as they, but from his own strong personal motives.

No less remarkable is Tariel's first appearance in the story. The arrival of a distinguished stranger is an extremely common theme in heroic poetry and is normally treated with some attention, but this arrival is unusually original. When Rostevan and Avt'handil are out hunting, they see seated on the bank of a stream a warrior weeping. A slave goes up to him and says that the king wishes to speak to him, but Tariel takes no notice whatsoever. The king then sends twelve slaves to fetch him. Tariel sees them, and does nothing but say 'Woe is me !' He is still deeply absorbed in his grief, but he is none the less a hero, as his next actions prove :

He passed his hands over his eyes, he wiped away the hot tears, he made fast his sabre and quiver, and braced his strong arms. He mounted his horse — why should he heed the words of slaves ? He wended his way elsewhere, and healed not their troubles.

The slaves stretched forth their hands to seize that knight; he fell upon them — alas ! even their enemies would have pitied them; he beat one against another, he slew them without raising his hand, some with his whip he smote, cleaving them down to the breast. (93-4)

Tariel may be sunk in dark thoughts of his lost mistress, but

when his honour is attacked, he behaves like a thoroughbred hero and exercises a prodigious strength of arm. His love-sick mood in no way interferes with his prowess, and even when it is not directly responsible for it, it still keeps him to a high code of conduct. His thoughts about his beloved are closely related to his proper pride, and any interruption of them is a deadly affront. It is hardly less characteristic that after killing the slaves he rides away without troubling to speak to their master.

More unexpected than this adaptation of heroic themes to a new outlook is an element of comedy in which Rust'hveli once at least indulges, almost at the expense of his heroic principles. Heroic poetry allows laughter even against its heroes, and it may be that Rust'hveli takes advantage of the old tradition in his account of Avt'handil's adventures with P'hatman. She is believed to have information about Nestan, and Avt'handil goes to her, disguised as a merchant. She is not a peerless beauty like Nestan and T'hinat'hin, but made of a coarser clay :

Dame P'hatman was attractive to the eye, not young, but brisk, of a good figure, dark in complexion, plump-faced, not wizened, a lover of minstrels and singers, a wine-drinker ; she had abundance of elegant gowns and head-dresses. (1055)

She falls in love with Avt'handil at first sight and declares her passion in a letter to him. To her surprise, and ours, he replies that he reciprocates her love and wishes to consummate it. Though she warns him not to come that night, he insists on doing so and finds P'hatman uneasy. Soon a young man appears in the doorway, curses her, and goes away. P'hatman tells Avt'handil that he must kill him, and this Avt'handil does. P'hatman is so relieved and delighted that she tells Avt'handil all that she knows about Nestan, which is of the greatest value, since it is the first definite news he has heard. Since she has treated him well, Avt'handil feels obliged to requite her love, but not without misgivings :

That night P'hatman enjoyed lying with Avt'handil; the knight unwillingly embraces her neck with his crystal neck — remembrance of T'hinat'hin slays him, he quakes with secret fear, his maddened heart raced away to the wild beasts and ran with them.

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Avt'handil secretly rains tears, they flow to mingle with the sea ; in an ink eddy floats a jetty ship. He says 'Behold me, O lovers, me who have a rose for my own ! Away from her, I, the nightingale, like a carrion-crow, sit on the dung-heap!'

The tears which flowed there from him would have melted a stone, the thicket of jet dammed them up, there is a pool on the rose-field. P'hatman rejoiced in him as if she were a nightingale ; if a crow find a rose, it thinks itself a nightingale. (1230-2)

The poet is plainly making some fun of P'hatman, but we cannot avoid the suspicion that he is also smiling slyly at Avt'handil. For neither of them does he show any disapproval, any more than Homer does for Odysseus' unwilling cohabitation with Circe and Calypso, and no doubt he could justify Avt'handil's behaviour on the ground that it will enable him to find Nestan and discharge his duty to Tariel. Though the whole episode is conducted in a gay, almost frivolous spirit, which looks like a burlesque on the prevailing tone of ideal love, yet it is not inconsistent with the scope of the story and indeed adds something to it by displaying yet another, if lower, level at which love can move.

This concentration on the cult of love does not prevent Rust'hveli from telling an exciting story or rivalling heroic poets in accounts of reckless action. A good example is when Tariel, to please Nestan, attacks China. The Chinese king, Ramaz, resorts to ruse and offers peace and gifts, pretending repentance for his misdeeds and asking Tariel to come with only a few knights, rather as in the Norse *Atlamål* Atli summons Gunnar to his hall. Tariel is at first deceived and does as he is asked, but he is warned that treachery is afoot and that the enemy have in concealment an enormous army, which will fall upon him and his two hundred men. Tariel proceeds according to plan with his small force, but when he sees the Chinese, denounces them for their treachery and prepares for battle, which takes a heroic form, in which the leader eclipses all his followers by his courage and skill :

'I swooped in like a falcon among a covey of grey partridges, I threw man upon man, I made a kill of men and horses ; the man thrown down by me spins like a dragon-fly ; I completely destroyed the two front squadrons.

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Crowding they surrounded me, about me was a great fight; when once I struck, none could stand, I made blood spurt forth as from a fountain, he whom I clove hung on his horse like a saddle-bag, wherever I was they fled from me, they were wary of me.' (432-3)

This prowess so frightens the Chinese that they prepare to surrender, but before they do so, the rest of Tariel's army comes up and routs them. It is an admirable episode in which the hero's individual valour is matched by his generalship and powers of command.

Even more exciting and original is the episode in which Nestan is at last delivered from the fortress where she is imprisoned. The fortress is not only extremely strong but held by a large garrison, and the three heroes, Tariel, Avt'handil, and P'hridon, discuss the best course of action. P'hridon is ready with a brilliant plan. He learned rope-walking as a boy and suggests that they throw a noose on a tower and let him walk along the rope, get into the fortress, and open the gates to them. Avt'handil rules this out because the guards will hear the clatter of P'hridon's armour and cut the rope. So instead he suggests that he disguise himself as a merchant, make his way inside, and then open the gates. Tariel rejects this because it means that Nestan will think that he has taken no part in the attack, and his honour will therefore be smirched. So he proposes that they divide their forces into three parties, and make simultaneous attacks on the three gates, thus dividing the enemy and preventing them from shutting the gates. This they do, and it succeeds. The episode shows the complex character of Rust'hveli's art. Despite his bold romantic outlook, when it comes to war, he makes it real and convincing. Tricks may be interesting enough, but he prefers the straightforward offensive. Moreover, in deciding what course of action to take the heroes are in the last resort moved by considerations of personal honour. It is wrong that one of them should take all the responsibility and win all the glory. So they agree on a plan by which each gets a fair share of both.

Rust'hveli varies his tale with other means than these. He is rich in charming surprises of simile and metaphor. He can sketch a scene in a few deft touches at once imaginative

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and real. His characters speak, or write letters, with an abundant eloquence and noble sentiment. By such devices the theme of ideal love, which might well become monotonous if extended over so wide a field, is diversified and kept lively. None the less the poem remains romantic in the sense that it portrays what Rust'hveli would wish life to be. The difference between him and most other writers of romance is that, while they are concerned mainly to amuse and entertain, Rust'hveli has a message, almost a gospel. In combining his Platonic doctrine of love with heroic actions on one side and a solid sense of reality on the other, he shows what its place in life ought to be. On his view it should exist in the real world and be associated with gallant exploits. More consistently and more thoroughly than the writers of French or Persian romance he works out the implications of his creed and shows what would happen if men lived up to it.

IV

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THE treatment which Dante gives to Provençal troubadours in the *Divine Comedy* is a salutary lesson on the fluctuations of literary taste. He seems to neglect unduly those whom we most admire and to select for special honour others who make little appeal to us. Neither in the *Divine Comedy* nor elsewhere does he mention Bernart de Ventadour or Jaufré Rudel or Marcabru, though Bernart might well have appealed to him by the pure quality of his love-poetry,¹ Rudel by his cult of an ideal lady, and Marcabru by his pungent realism. The powerful and impressive Bertran de Born is indeed praised at *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ii, 2, as a pre-eminent poet of war, and at *Convito*, IV, II, for his courtesy and liberality, but in the *Divine Comedy* he is placed among the sowers of discord, because he set the Young King against his father, Henry II;² and his poetry is not mentioned. It is also true that Sordello, whose lament for Blacatz is a noble monument of Provençal art, is praised at *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, i, 15, as an eminent practitioner of words, and plays a considerable part in the *Purgatorio*, but though Dante clearly knows and admires his poetry, he seems to value him more for his connection with Mantua and Virgil and for his robust political opinions. Of course the *Divine Comedy* is not a work of literary criticism, and we cannot expect Dante to set forth in it all his likes and dislikes in poetry, but in it he pays much attention to poetry and to some poets whom he admires. He fully realised his own debt to the troubadours and appreciated their achievement, but he displayed his respect in a tribute not to one of

¹ H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 78, points out the close resemblance between Dante's conception of poetry at *Purg.* xxiv, 52-4 and that of Bernart in Poem XV, ed. Appel.

² *Inf.* xxviii, 134 ff.

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the more familiar and attractive figures but to the enigmatic and forbidding Arnaut Daniel, of Ribérac in the Dordogne, who was a friend of Richard Coeur de Lion in the last decade of the twelfth century.

On the Mount of Purgatory, where the sexual sinners are purged in flame, Dante meets the Bolognese poet, Guido Guinizelli, and sees in him his master, whose work will live :

'Li dolci detti vostri,
Che, quanto durerà l' uso moderno,
Faranno cari ancora i loro inchiostri.'
(*Purg.* xxvi, 112-14)

(' Your own sweet ditties, which,
So long as modern use is not let die,
The ink that they were written in shall enrich.')

(Binyon)

Such praise is not unexpected, since Dante praises Guinizelli in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, i, 9, for his skilful use of the vernacular and in *Convito*, IV, 20, for his right understanding of love in his poem *Al cor gentil ripara sempre amore*. Guinizelli was near to Dante's heart, the beloved master who knew what poetry ought to be. So, when through Dante's verse Guinizelli speaks on literary matters, he must be heard with respectful attention. After listening to Dante's praise of him, Guinizelli points to another figure :

'O frate,' disse, 'questi ch' io ti scerno
Col dito', ed additò un spirto innanzi,
' Fu miglior fabbro del parlar materno.

Versi d' amore e prose di romanzi
Soperchi6 tutti, e lascia dir gli stolti
Che quel di Lemosi credon ch' avanzi.'
(*Purg.* xxvi, 115-20)

('O brother,' said he, 'he who is singled by
My finger' (he pointed to a spirit in front)
'Wrought better in the mother-tongue than I.

Whether in verse of love or prose romaunt
He surpassed all; and let the fools contend
Who make him of Limoges of more account.')

(Binyon)

This person is Arnaut Daniel, and there can be no doubt of the main import of the words. Guinizelli says that Arnaut is a better workman in his mother-tongue of Provençal than he, Guinizelli, is in Italian; that Arnaut surpasses all other poets in verses of love and tales of romance, and is superior to 'him of Limoges', that is, to Guiraut de Borneil, whom public opinion, holding more by rumour than by truth, prefers. After this tribute, Dante speaks to Arnaut, who replies in eight lines of resplendent poetry in the Provençal tongue.

Arnaut is praised alike for his 'versi d' amore' and his 'prose di romanzi'. The two kinds of work are clearly separate and even contrasted. Very little indeed is known of the 'prose di romanzi'. On the whole it is probable that they were stories in prose, since, although *prosa* can be used for work in verse, as by the Spanish poet, Gonzalo de Berceo,¹ this is not how Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini, uses it, when he distinguishes between writing 'en prose' and 'en risme',² or Dante himself, when he distinguishes what is written 'prosaice' from what is written 'metrice'.³ Arnaut, we may conclude, wrote prose romances. About them we have only a few hints. In his *Discorsi sul poema eroico*, 46, Torquato Tasso says that Arnaut Daniel wrote of Lancelot, and though Tasso is not a final authority on the authorship of a work of the twelfth century, he at least shows that in his time a *Lancillotto* was attributed to Arnaut.⁴ Arnaut may also have written a *Rinaldo*, since Luigi Pulci refers to such a work three times in his *Morgante maggiore* and attributes it to Arnaldo.⁵ Of course this may not be Arnaut Daniel, but it is at least possible that it is. There the scanty evidence for Arnaut's romances ends. They are lost, and we can judge Dante's opinion of his work only by the extant 'versi d' amore'.

Eighteen complete poems survive,⁶ and since the shortest

¹ *Vida de Sancto Domingo*, 5 : 'Quiero far una prosa en roman paladino'.

² *Trésor*, iii, 10.

³ *De Vulg. El.* ii, i.

⁴ Perhaps Dante refers to the *Lancillotto* at *Inf.* V, 127 ff., and draws on it at *Par.* xvi, 13 ff.

⁵ xxv, 115, and 168-9; xxvii, 79-80.

⁶ The poems have been well edited by U. A. Canello (Halle, 1883) and by R. Lavaud (Toulouse, 1910); I am greatly indebted to both.

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has 35 lines and the longest 109, we can see what kind of love-poetry Arnaut wrote. And here a problem arises. Even those who have a taste for Provençal verse are not usually attracted by Arnaut. W. P. Ker's paper on 'Dante, Guido Guinizelli, and Arnaut Daniel'¹ shows the difficulties which a sensitive scholar may find when he tries to see Arnaut through Dante's eyes. He is perplexed by two problems. First, he feels that 'Arnaut has nothing of that idealism which was the essence of the new style in Italy', and secondly, he is unable to understand Dante's admiration for Arnaut's style. Assuming that in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante demands a special kind of verbal euphony, Ker finds nothing of the sort in Arnaut and complains that his words are harsh and ugly and that he has 'a curious violent emphasis', which comes out 'in his harsh use of monosyllables, in his liking for images of winter, in the strength of his protestations'. Ker is in fact disturbed that Dante should choose for admiring attention a poet who has neither the grace of Bernart de Ventadour nor the liveliness of Guillaume of Aquitaine. To his questions Ker finds no answer, but concludes by hinting that after all Dante must have admired Arnaut for his romances, as if it were impossible to admire him for his love-poems. It is a confession of defeat and despair and at variance with what Dante says both in the *Purgatorio* and elsewhere. Dante certainly thinks that Arnaut's verses are at least as eminent as his romances, and the comparison between Guido or Guiraut and Arnaut is on the comparative merits of their poetry. Whatever his reasons may have been, Dante clearly admired Arnaut as a poet.

Ker claims that Arnaut has no idealism in love, and assumes that this lack should disqualify him for Dante's admiration. But much depends on what we mean by idealism. It is of course true that Arnaut has not Dante's mature conception of a man's love for a woman as a celestial power which brings him nearer to God. He has not even such a notion of honourable and chaste devotion as we find in

¹ *Form and Style in Poetry* (London, 1929), pp. 319-28. Though I disagree with Ker's estimate of Arnaut, he deserves, as always, gratitude and respect for raising important questions and setting them in their historical context.

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Sordello. But we may doubt whether such notions were possible in the twelfth century when Arnaut wrote ; they are the product of a long process of development which culminated only in Dante's time. Yet Arnaut has his own conception of love, which is, within its own limits and in its own way, idealistic. He knows the ideas of Provençal courtly love, elaborates them, and puts his own impress on them. His typical approach may be seen from Poem XV, which is, indeed, so representative of his art that it may be quoted in full:

Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz
 Al cor, d'amor sofren per sobramar,
 Car mos volers es tant fermes et entiers
 C'anc no s'esduis de celliei ni s'estors
 Cui encubic al prim vezer e puois ;
 Qu'ades ses lieis dic a lieis cochos motz,
 Pois quan la vei non sai, — tant Pai, — que dire.

D'autras vezer sui sees e d'auzir sortz,
 Qu'en sola lieis vei et aug et esgar;
 E jes d'aisso no-ill sui fals plazentiers
 Que mais la vol non ditz la boca 1 cors ;
 Qu'eu no vau tant chams, vauz ni plans ni puois
 Qu'en un sol cors trob aissi bos aips totz ;
 Qu'en lieis los vole Dieus triar et assire.

Ben ai estat a maintas bonas cortz
 Mas sai ab lieis trob pro mais que lauzar:
 Mesura e sen et autres bos mestiers,
 Beutat, joven, bos faitz e bels demors.
 Gen Pensignet Cortesia e la duois;
 Tant a de si totz faitz desplazens rotz
 De lieis no ere rens de ben sia a dire.

Nuils jauzimens nom fora breus ni cortz
 De lieis, cui prec qu'o vuoilla devinar,
 Que ja per mi non o sabra estiers
 Si'l cors, ses digz, nos presenta de fors ;
 Que jes Rozers, per aiga que i'engrois,
 Non a tal briu c'al cor plus larga dotz
 No'm fassa estanc d'amor, quand la remire.

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Jois e solatz d'autra-m par fals e bortz,
C'una de pretz ab lieis no is pot egar,
Que l sieus solatz es dels autres sobriers.
Ai! si no l'ai, las! tant mal m'a comors!
Pero l'afans m'es deportz, ris e jois,
Car en pensan sui de lieis lecs e glotz :
Ai Dieus, si ja'n serai estiers jauzire!

Anc mais, so'us pliu, no-in plac tant treps ni bortz,
Ni res al cor tant de joi no'm poc dar
Cum fetz aquel, don anc feinz lausengiers
No s'esbrugic, qu'a mi sol so's tresors.
Dic trop ? Eu non, sol lieis non sia enois.
Bella, per Dieu, lo parlar e la votz
Vuoill perdre enans que diga ren que'us tire.

Ma chansos prec que no'us sia enois,
Car si voletz grazir lo son e'ls motz
Pauc preza Arnautz cui que plassa o que tire.

.

(I only, who endure excess of pain,
Know of a heart that too much love subdues.
My love for her, unshaken and complete,
Has never turned aside nor looked elsewhere
Since the first sight of her inflamed my mind.
When I am far from her, my speech upsprings;
When she is near, my rushing thought denies it.

I'm blind to others, deaf to their refrain ;
For her alone I listen, look, and muse.
No flattering, false praises I repeat;
My heart wants her more than my words declare.
On fields, dales, plains and hills I shall not find
United in one being all such things.
Her worth's from God, who guides and glorifies it.

Although to many a goodly court I've been,
In her I find to sing more praises, whose
Nature has measure, wit, and gifts to mate,
Beauty and grace, high actions and proud air.
By Courtesy she's fashioned and designed;
All moods ungracious far from her she flings.
Her virtue's perfect. Nothing can disguise it.

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The joys she gives to me fail not nor wane.
Let her, I pray, unravel my hid clues;
For nothing will she learn in words' debate
Unless my silent heart reveal its care.
Though the Rhone flood with waters unconfined,
Yet stronger to my heart the brimming springs
Come hurtling from her glances to surprise it. .

Joy from another bastard is and vain.
Above all others' merits are her dues ;
No other woman's charms with hers I rate.
Ah, if I have her not! 'Tis my despair!
Yet in my torment joy and bliss are twined.
My thought, a dainty glutton, to this clings.
God, if I get no more! Nothing outvies it!

In dance and joust I'll not delight again,
For nothing can my heart with joy suffuse
Compared with her. No one in gossip prate
Shall noise abroad what secret wealth we share.
Is that too much ? My faith, no! — she's too kind.
But if, my lady, this my utterance stings,
Out with the tongue and voice that would devise it!

I pray you may not think my song unkind,
But if my music your approval brings,
Arnaut cares not who praise or who despise it!)¹

This is a fair sample of what Arnaut means by love, and shows that his outlook is in some ways like Dante's, if not in the *Divine Comedy*, at least in the *Vita nuova*. Both record the same stunning effect of love at first sight, the same pride in the unique qualities of the beloved, the same attribution to her of all virtues. Arnaut praises the courtesy which formed his lady ; Dante refers to Beatrice's 'unspeakable courtesy' when she salutes him (3). Arnaut claims that he will keep his love secret; Dante prides himself on doing so (4). Arnaut defies the scandal-mongers who gossip about him ; Dante records an occasion when he suffered from evil rumours which reached Beatrice about him (10). Arnaut

¹ A fine vigorous translation of this poem can be found in Ezra Pound, *Quia Pauper Amavi*, pp. 12-13. I have used my own much inferior version because it is perhaps rather more literal.

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says that in his lady's presence he becomes speechless ; Dante tells how in love his body 'many times fell like a heavy lifeless thing' (11). In many ways the cult of love as Arnaut and Dante observe it has common characteristics.

Arnaut goes even further than this when he tells how love for a beautiful woman breeds virtues in men :

Amor es de pretz la claus,
E de proesa us estancs,
Don naisson tuich li bon fruich,
S'es qui leialmen los cuoilla;
Qu'un non delis gel ni niula
Mentre que-s noiris el bel tronç;
Mas srl romp trefans ni culvertz
Peris tro leials lo sagre.

(xi, 9-16)

(Love's the key to all true worth
And a shoot of excellence,
Whereon every good fruit grows,
If one pick them faithfully.
Frost and fog destroy them not,
Whilst the good trunk nurtures them ;
Tricks and falsehood wither them,
Till true lover tend them well.)

Or again :

D'amor mi pren penssan lo fuocs
E'l desiriers doutz e coraus ;
E-l mal es saboros qu'ieu sint
E-il flama soaus on plus m'art:
C'amors enquier los sieus d'aital semblan,
Verais, francs, fis, merceians, parcedors,
Car a sa cort notz orguoills e val blandres.

(xiii, 8-14)

(I muse, and love's fire seizes me,
A penetrating, sweet desire.
I feel a most delicious pain,
Sweeter the flame, the more it burns.
Love makes his own in this similitude,
Frank, truthful, loyal, humble, merciful;
For at his court pride fails and kindness wins.)

When Arnaut says that love induces humility, he anticipates

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Dante, who makes it the basis of love's ennobling effects and more than once refers to it in the *Vita nuova* :

E qual soffrisse di starla a vedere
Diverria nobil cosa, o si morria :
E quando trova alcun che degno sia
Di veder lei, quei prova sua virtute ;
Ché gli addivien, ciò che gli dà salute,
E si l' umilia, che ogni offesa oblia.

(19)

(While any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be ennobled, or else die.
When one deserving to be raised so high
Is found, 'tis then her power attains its proof,
Making his heart strong for his soul's behoof
With the full strength of meek humility.)

(D. G. Rossetti)

Or

Ogni dolcezza, ogni pensiero umile
Nasce nel core a chi parlar la sente ;
Ond' è laudato chi prima la vide.

(21)

(For every sweetness, every lowly thought
Springs in the heart of him who hears her speak,
Whence he is praised who first has looked on her.)

Or

La vista sua face ogni cosa umile,
E no fa sola sè parer piacente,
Ma ciascuna per lei riceve onore.

(27)

(The sight of her makes all things lowlier,
And makes not only her more beautiful,
But through her everyone is honoured too.)

Dante's view of love's ennobling and inspiring influence, as put forward in the *Vita nuova*, is not far removed from what Arnaut says in some of his poems.

Arnaut, however, is not always so idealistic and high-minded as this, but seems at times to oscillate between protestations of purity and something more dubious, nor do his learned parallels always make his position clearer. Thus, though he may claim that his love for his lady is like that of Meleager for Atalanta (xi, 32), a famous case of pure devotion

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derived from Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we are not so comfortable when he draws a comparison with Paris and Helen, who were for the Middle Ages, as for classical antiquity, a type of guilty passion :

Ges non es croia
Cella cui soi amis ;
De sai Savoia
Plus bella no's noiris ;
Tals m'abelis
Don ieu plus ai de joia
Non ac Paris
D'Elena, eel de Troia.
(iii, 42-8)

(She'll not annoy
Her friend who worships her;
This side Savoy
No one is lovelier ;
Her I prefer
To all. No greater joy
Did Paris stir,
Who loved Helen of Troy.)

We might argue that Arnaut regards himself as superior to Paris because his love is pure, but the comparison is piquant, if not ambiguous, and after it we are not sure where he really stands. Nor, in fact, is Arnaut always high-minded. At times he is sufficiently outspoken to leave no doubt about the nature of his desires. In Poem XV the fifth stanza suggests that he wishes for the physical consummation of his passion, even though he hardly dares to think of it. In Poem XII he hints that he has enjoyed it in the past and hopes to enjoy it again in the future :

Dieus lo chautitz,
Per cui foron assoutas
Las faillidas que fetz Longis lo cecs,
Voilla, s'l platz, qu'ieu e midonz jassam
En la chambra on amdui nos mandem
Uns rics convens don tan gran joi atendi,
Que'l seu bel cors baisan rizen descobra
E que'l remir contrail him de la lampa.
(xii, 33-40)

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(Most gracious God,
Who didst forgiveness grant
To blind Longinus for his trespasses,
Grant, if it please Thee, that my lady and I
Lie in the chamber where we held our first
Rich dalliance. For this great joy I wak,
When smiling, kissing I shall see her form
And contemplate her by the lantern's light.)

Arnaut, it seems clear, was not so consistent an idealist in love as Dante might demand, and that is no doubt why Dante put him among the carnal sinners in Purgatory. So far as poets are concerned, he is in good company, since Guinizelli is also there. As a moralist Dante was implacable, but as a lover of poetry he was more charitable. He must have seen that Arnaut's love-poetry did not always satisfy the highest standards of morality, but he liked it nevertheless, and thought that of the poets who had written about love Arnaut was the greatest; and after all there was enough in common between their two outlooks to justify such a conclusion.

Dante's views on Arnaut may be gathered in greater detail from the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. At ii, 2, when he classifies the subjects treated by eminent poets in their own vernaculars, his Provençal examples for arms, love, and right-mindedness — *rectitudo* — are respectively Bertran de Born, Arnaut Daniel, and Guiraut de Borneil, and the piece of Arnaut's which he selects for mention is Poem IX, *Uaura amara*. Nor is it impossible to surmise why he made this choice. In *Uaura amara* Arnaut begins with a description not of spring but of winter, and this image of his lady's coldness evokes not complaints or recriminations but protestations of fidelity and a confident assertion that nothing can shake him, since he glories and delights in the pains of such a love. A similar imagery and a not very dissimilar spirit may be found in Dante's *sestina*, *Al poco giorno*, of which the opening stanza sets the tone and introduces the main themes :

Al poco giorno ed al gran cerchio d' ombra
Son giunto, lasso! ed al bianchir de' colli,
Quando si perde lo color neir erba;

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E 'l mio disio però non cangia il verde,
Si è barbato nella dura pietra,
Che parla e sente come fosse donne.

(To the dim light and the great circling shade
I've Come, ah me, and to the whitening hills,
When all the colour vanishes from the grass;
And yet my longing changes not its green,
So deeply rooted is it in hard stone,
Which talks and hears as though it were a woman.)

Dante is not so confident as Arnaut, nor is his imagery so straightforward, but his theme of a wintry love and his sense that he cannot get away from it, no less than his unusually astringent temper, suggest that he has learned something from Arnaut and especially from the bold masculinity of *L'aura amara*. Perhaps he felt that this was the kind of poem which a man should write when, though his devotion is unrequited, he still continues to love a lady at a respectful distance.

The second passage on Arnaut is more technical. At ii, 5-6, Dante discusses *constructio* and chooses Arnaut's kind as being 'sapidus et venustus etiam et excelsus' ('savoury and charming and even lofty'). The example taken to illustrate these qualities is Poem XV, *Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan que'm sortz*, which we have quoted in full. The word *constructio*, derived ultimately from Latin grammarians like Priscian,¹ was used by technical writers of the twelfth century with reference to the construction of sentences and verses according to accepted rules and may almost be translated 'style' in the sense of the choice and arrangement of words. The adjectives *sapidus*, *venustus*, and *excelsus* come from similar ancient sources by much the same route. Nor is there serious doubt of their meaning. *Sapida*, according to Geoffroi de Vinsauf in his *Documentum de Arte Versificatoria*, ii, 16, is used of words when they are *placentia* or pleasing.² Whatever others may have thought of Arnaut's style, Dante found it agreeable. *Venustus* seems to have been applied

¹ *Inst. Gr. viiii*, 'constructio est dictionum congrua in oratione ordinatio'.

² E. Faral, *Les Arts poetiques du XIP et du XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1923), p. 288.

especially to the order and structure of words in a period and was traditionally connected with *dignitas*, as in *Ad Herennium*, ix, 13, 18. Finally, Arnaut is *excelsus*, a quality which Geoffroi associates with the amplification and elaboration secured by metaphors and personifications.¹ If we apply these adjectives to Arnaut's Poem XV, we can see their relevance. It has undoubtedly a vivid choice of words arranged in firm and expressive sentences ; it is diversified with original and impressive images, and is therefore worthy to be called lofty.

The other two references to Arnaut in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* are less important, though they add something to our information. At ii, 10, Dante treats of the construction of a strophe and the disposition of its rhymes, and says that one kind is 'continua usque ad ultimum progressive', that Arnaut uses this in nearly all his poems, and that he himself uses it in *Al poco gtorno*. He refers to the kind of stanza which does not have its own separate, self-contained system of rhymes but is connected through its rhymes with all the other stanzas of a poem. In this he classes together two different forms of poem. The first is the *sestina*, which has, strictly speaking, no rhymes, since the same set of words is used at the ends of lines throughout, but Dante seems to go out of his way to mention it because Arnaut's Poem XVIII, *Lo ferm voter qu'el cor m'intra*, was surely the model for his own *Al poco giorno*. It was almost inevitable that Dante, with his love of formality, should admire the *sestina*, since, whatever its limitations may be, it has a logical and mathematical completeness, in that the first verse fixes the shape and length of the whole poem. The second form of poem is, as Dante says, common in Arnaut's works. In it, even though there may be internal rhymes within a stanza, each stanza as a whole rhymes with every other, and in each, as Dante observes at ii, 13, 'nulla rithimorum habitudo attenditur'. For this he quotes Arnaut's Poem XVII, *Si' mfors Amors de joi donat tan larga*. Since twelve of Arnaut's poems conform to this scheme, it is clear that he had a predilection for

¹ E. Fatal, *Les Arts pottiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1923), pp. 204 ff.

it. It too has the advantage that it binds the separate stanzas together in a progressive continuity and makes them all contribute to a united effect. Dante, it is true, does not explicitly praise either the *sestina* or this other kind of verse, but we can hardly doubt that he approved of both. He used the *sestina*, which may well be Arnaut's invention, not only for *Al poco giorno* but for *Amor, tu vedi ben*, and his careful description of the second kind of poem suggests that it appealed to his sense of structure and completeness.

Since Dante's remarks on Arnaut's poetry prove that he studied it with considerable care and that his high opinion of it was no mere passing fancy, we may ask what he thought of Arnaut's alleged faults, such as the vocabulary which W. P. Ker found so ugly. In his discussion of the right words for poetry Dante attaches importance to 'grandiosa vocabula' and divides them into two classes, which he calls respectively 'pexa' ('combed') and 'hirsuta' ('shaggy'). The metaphor in both cases comes from hair, whether of a garment or the head, and was familiar to literary theory in the twelfth century, when Geoffroi de Vinsauf and Matthieu de Vendôme use it to describe classes of words. So Geoffroi says that we call adjectives 'perpexa' since 'per pexionem designamus ornatum, sicut cum dicitur "Verba habes perpexa", id est "ornata"'.¹ If the image can be applied to certain words, it can also be applied to an apt use of metaphor, when we may be said 'polire, pectere, comere in verbo'.² At the end of his *Poetria nova* he sums up the help which he has given to intending poets by comparing it to the use of a comb :

Ecce dedi pecten, quo si sint pexa relucet
Carmina tam prosae quam metra.³

If the literary theorists use 'pexa' as a word of praise to denote some kind of polish or elegance, they use 'hirsuta' in an condemnatory sense for what should be avoided. Matthieu de Vendôme expressly lays down that words should not be 'hirsuta' and that the writer should take care 'ne ex penuria ornatus hirsuta verborum aggregatio in metro videatur mendi-

¹ Fatal, *op. cit.* p. 286.

² *Ibid.* p. 289.

³ *Ibid.* p. 257.

care' ('lest from poverty of ornament the shaggy accumulation of words in metre seem to indicate beggarliness'), on the principle that no one makes a festal garment from goat's wool.¹ This was the traditional view, and Dante revolutionises it by claiming that both 'combed' and 'shaggy' words are needed in a full style, since they contribute equally to an ultimate grandeur.² In this he may well have had Arnaut in mind and have learned something from him. Dante classes monosyllables as 'shaggy' and, as Ker complains, Arnaut uses such words as *letz*, *bees*, *balps*, and *mutz*. Dante saw that to create a really expressive and 'tragic' language he must employ both rough and smooth elements to break the softness and ease into which Italian verse too readily falls. Just as in his own poetry he often chooses rough words to suit his rougher effects, so in the poetry of Arnaut he recognises their worth in the right place.

Dante's appreciation of Arnaut's style may be gauged from the words which he makes him speak in the *Divine Comedy*:

'Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman,
Qu'ieu no-m puesc, ni-me voil a vos cobrire.

leu sui Arnaut, que plor, e vau cantan ;
Consiros vei la passada folor,
E vei jauzen lo jorn, qu'esper, denan.

Ara vos prec, per aquella valor
Que vos guida al som de l'escalina,
Sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor.'
(*Purg.* xxvi, 140-7)

('Your courteous request pleases me so,
I have no power or will from you to hide.

I am Arnald, and I weep and singing go.
I think on my past folly and see the stain,
And view with joy the day I hope to know.

I pray you by the Goodness which doth deign
To guide you to the summit of this stair
Bethink you in due season of my pain.')
(Binyon)

¹ Faral, *op. cit.* p. 154.

² *De Vulg.* EL ii, 7, 6.

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The Provençal words given to Arnaut are another testimony to Dante's admiration and understanding of him, and the radiant poetry speaks for itself. In these eight lines not only is Arnaut's manner fully assimilated but his characteristic phrases are picked up and turned to a special purpose. Words which he has used of his earthly loves receive a new significance in Purgatory. 'Valor', which he uses of his lady's worth (v, 33), is now used of the divine power which guides Dante on his journey ; 'jauzen' is transferred from the joy which she gives him (xv, 22) to his joy in the hope of salvation ; 'folor', of which he once accused those who think love painful (vii, 34), is now applied to his own faults in his previous existence. So too when he says 'leu sui Arnaut, que plor, e vau cantan', one of his favourite mannerisms is given a new point'. In fourteen of his eighteen surviving poems Arnaut refers to himself by name in the third person and at one place speaks much as Dante makes him speak here :

leu sui Arnaut, qu'amas l'aura
E chatz la lebre ab lo bou
E nadi contra suberna.

(x, 43-5)

(I am Arnaut, who reap the wind
And chase the leveret with the ox
And swim against the current.)

What was before a conceited boast now becomes a proclamation of repentance for sins and of gratitude for divine mercy. So too when Arnaut goes back into the flame which is his punishment:

Poi s' ascose nel foco che gli affina
(*Purg.* xxvi, 148)

(Then he shrank back in the refining fire)
(Binyon)

we cannot but connect the present occasion with those passages (vi, 49 ; viii, 21 ; xiii, 8 ; xv, 33) in which Arnaut declares what pleasure he finds in the fires of love. When Dante turns Arnaut's phrases and ideas against his earlier outlook, he shows how well he knows and appreciates him.

In the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante seems to class Arnaut

and Guiraut de Borneil as equally eminent and to contradict what he says in the *Purgatorio*, where the popular preference for Guiraut is condemned. When he wrote the latter passage, Dante may well have changed his ideas about Guiraut, and his dismissal of Guiraut's admirers may reflect his distaste for an enthusiasm which he had once shared but now abandoned. But the matter is slightly more complicated than that. In the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante claims not that Guiraut is comparable as a poet to Arnaut but that he is pre-eminent as a poet of *rectitudo*. In this he no doubt refers to Guiraut's *sirventés*, of which fifteen survive and in which Guiraut shows himself a serious critic of moral and political issues. But we may well doubt whether Dante would regard the poetry of *rectitudo* as equal to the poetry of love or a poet who excelled in it as of the highest class. For him the poetry of love is superior to any other kind, since he ascribes to love the motive power of his own creativeness :

'Io mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, cd a quel modo
Che ditta dentro vo significando.'

(*Purg.* xxiv, 52-4)

'(I am one who hearkens when
Love prompteth, and I put thought into word
After the mode which he dictates within.)'

(Binyon)

Dante places the poet of love above the poet of *rectitudo* because love is a more important subject. It is true that Guiraut is a notable poet of love and that his *alba* or dawn-song is one of the freshest and most charming relics of Provençal poetry. But neither it nor his many love-songs seem to have touched Dante as Arnaut's did, perhaps because on the whole they lack Arnaut's bounding confidence and inventive artistry.

Dante's preference of Arnaut to Guiraut may have been strengthened by other considerations of a more theoretical character. The two men held different views of poetry, and Dante would have known of them. The Provençal poets of the twelfth century disputed often and eagerly about the comparative merits of the *trobar leu* and the *trobar clus*,

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which may roughly be distinguished as clear and obscure poetry. The advocates of the *trobar clus* prided themselves on being hard to understand and liked to dress their thoughts in ambiguity and esoteric allusions. They might pass it off humorously, as when Peire d'Auvergne says of himself:

Per o majestres es de totz
Ab qu'un pauc esclarzis sos motz,
Qu'a penas nulhs om los enten.
(xii, 82-4 Zenker)

(He's the best poet anywhere,
If he'd but make his words more clear ;
For very few them understand.)

Or they might take a pride in their ability to puzzle their readers, as Marcabru does :

De pluzors sens
Sui pies e prens
De cent colors per meills chاوزir;
Fog porti sai
Et aigua lai,
Ab que sai la flam' escantir.
(xvi, 49-54 Dejeanne)

(My meanings I
So richly ply
That hundreds of them strike my aim ;
Here flame I bear,
And water there,
With which myself put out the flame.)

If there is an element of vanity and display in these claims, there is also something more serious. The exponents of *trobar clus* saw that plain statement may not always be enough and that a new depth is gained by complexity. Their claims were denied by some distinguished poets, and the controversy, which began in the twelfth century, lasted almost into Dante's time.

Though Guiraut began as an advocate of the *trobar clus*, he changed his views and his allegiance. A poem in alternate verses between him and Raimbaut d'Orange argues the case for and against clear poetry. Guiraut defends it on the ground that the poet's only reward is to reach a large public

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and this is impossible if nobody understands what he says. Though Raimbaut's answer is not a defence of the *trobar clus*, of which he was not an adherent, it is certainly an attack on the *trobar leu*:

Giraut, sol que'l melhs aparelh
E di'ades e trai'enan,
Me no chal si tan no s'espan;
C'anc grans viltatz
No fo denhtatz ;
Per so prez'om mais aur que sal
E de chan es tot atretal.
(Iviii, 28-35 Kolsen)

(Guiraut, if I give of my best
And set my thoughts out worthily,
Praise from the crowd is naught to me.
No vulgar fare
Are dainties rare;
As salt is less esteemed than gold,
Of poetry the same I hold.)

While Guiraut seeks popularity, Raimbaut believes in art for art's sake and the primary claims of quality.

A similar controversy took place a little later in Italy, when Bonagiunta of Lucca accused Guido Guinizelli of being unnecessarily obscure and wrote a sonnet attacking him for abandoning the pleasing manner of love-poetry. He compares his work to a light in dark corners when it ought to be like the sun, and ascribes his practice to vanity. In particular he tells him that he has become so subtle as to be unintelligible :

Ma si passate ogn' om di sottiglianza
Che non si trova già chi ben vi spogna,
Cotant' é scura vostra parladura.

.

(In subtlety you so surpass all men
That none is found who can interpret you;
Your way of speech has such obscurity.)

Guinizelli replies with another sonnet in which, after asserting that a man must have regard for his condition and nature and that only a fool believes himself to be the sole repository

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of truth, he argues that, as there are many kinds of birds, so are there also of poets :

Dio in ciascun grado sua natura mise,
E' fe' dispari senni e movimenti:
E però ciò, ch' uom pensa, no dee dire.

(God set its nature upon each degree
And made disparity of wits and sense ;
So, what a man thinks, let him speak it not.)

Guinizelli's reply to Bonagiunta is in effect no more than an appeal for freedom and tolerance and a polite way of saying that he has no intention of modifying his practice. Of this controversy Dante was probably aware, and he certainly had his own view of the comparative merits of the two poets. In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, i, 13, he says that Bonagiunta's style is 'not curial but merely municipal'. This criticism he elaborates and explains in the *Purgatorio*, when he discusses poetry with Bonagiunta, and makes him admit that his manner has been misguided :

'lo veggio ben come le vostre penne
Diretro al dittator sen vanno strette,
Che delle nostre certo non avvenne;

E qual più a guardar oltre si mette
Non vede più dall' uno all' altro stilo.'
(*Purg.* xxiv, 58-62)

(' For now I see well how the pen with you
Follows him who dictateth close behind,
Which our pens truly were not wont to do;

And he who seeks to look beyond can find
No difference else 'twixt one and the other style.'
(Binyon)

Dante's criticism of Bonagiunta is that he spoke not from the heart but in a conventional manner. If we relate this to the controversy between him and Guinizelli, we see what Dante's position was. He regards undue simplicity as false simplification and takes his stand against it. We may conclude that he would be equally against the *trobar leu* as Guiraut de Borneil advocated it.

It is, however, characteristic of Dante's independence that, though he disapproves of undue simplification, he says nothing in favour of the *trobar clus* and its adherents but gives his support to a middle position between the two extremes. He resembles Raimbaut d'Orange, who rejected the *trobar leu* as commonplace and the *trobar clus* as unintelligible and placed his hopes on a third kind, the *trobar ric*, which sought to secure a grand style without being too esoteric. Just as Raimbaut claims that he makes every word significant:

Cars, bruns e teinz motz entrebesc
Pensius-pensanz . . .

(xxii, 9-20 Appel)

Rare, dark and coloured words I wind
In thoughtful thought . . .

so Dante insists that, if a poet is to sing of the highest subjects, he must use the 'tragic style', in which the elevation of the *constructio* agrees with the excellence of the words. For him this is the only style for such themes as salvation, love, and virtue.¹ When he praises Arnaut for his use of words and says that he is 'excelsus', he shows what he thinks of his style and where he places him in the controversy about clear and obscure poetry. For Dante, Arnaut belongs to the middle party and is on the right lines because he aims at majesty of language without being too obscure. Nor is this contrary to the facts. Arnaut, like Raimbaut, was an exponent of the *trobar ric*,² and this accounts for the discrepancy between what others thought of him and what he says of himself. If the Monk of Montaudan says of him :

A sa vida be non chantet,
Mas us fals motz c'om non enten,
(i, 44-5 Klein)

(In life he sang not well, but made
Mad verses no man understands,)

Arnaut is fully conscious of such charges and takes pains to answer them by saying that his words are 'simple and fine'

¹ *De Vulg. El.* ii, 4, 7.

² A. Jeanroy, *La Poesie lyrique des troubadours* (Paris, 1934), ii, 47-51.

(ii, 1) and his song 'light and easy' (vii, 36) or 'gracious and gay' (ix, 1). We may find this difficult to accept, but it is at least true that Arnaut's obscurity comes more from his vocabulary and his allusions than from his thoughts and his presentation of them. As an exponent of the *trobar ric* he tries to state emotions in their fulness and strength with appropriate dignity and without either falsifying them through simplification or concealing them in ambiguous mystery. Of this middle way Dante approved. He was with Guinizelli and Arnaut against Bonagiunta and Guiraut, and his own consummate art owed much to experiments which men like Arnaut had made in trying to create a more pungent and more impressive style for poetry.

This does not mean that Arnaut is a poet whom we can read easily for pleasure, but it does mean that, when Dante thought about his own art, he saw that certain poetical problems which troubled him had been faced and to some degree solved by Arnaut. For this he could not but be grateful. Great poets are not necessarily good critics, since their first concern is with their own poetry and the problems which it raises for them, and this prepossession may blind them to the merits of others who have different gifts and pursue different ends. This is true enough of Dante, who, with his strong personal tastes and highly original conception of poetry, was likely to be less than generous to men from whose themes and technique he had nothing to learn. With Arnaut it was different. Here was a poet whose chief subject was love and who sought to present it in a suitably rich and lofty style. For us it is difficult to see Arnaut as Dante saw him. His brusque Provençal has not the fluent grace of Italian ; his complex emotions belong to a world of romantic chivalry which is far indeed from modern experience ; his boldness and his violence are more disturbing than attractive. But he wished to be not sweet but powerful, and that, with all his idiosyncrasies, he undoubtedly is. That is why Dante, who saw that the soft Italian tongue might easily become too sweet and need some astringent corrective, liked and admired him.

V

THE SONGS OF GIL VICENTE.

PURE song is one of the rarest and most precious kinds of poetry. If it comes into existence with a musical accompaniment and owes much of its shape and character to this, it can none the less have its own completeness and perfection and move so easily with its own lilt that no tune is needed to support it. Though the art of song is universal and must be nearly as old as man, there are a few choice periods when it attains an unusual splendour because what has hitherto been largely instinctive and unpremeditated is taken up by poets conscious of their craft, stripped of its garrulity or carelessness, and given a new grace and economy and concentration. This happened with Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., with Portugal in the thirteenth century A.D., with Spain in the fifteenth, and with England in the sixteenth. At such times a flourishing art of song, practised by the common people and concerned with their fancies and ceremonies, is taken up by cultivated poets who give to it a new charm and elegance without impairing its original sweetness and simplicity. Sometimes by a miraculous chance genius takes command, and then we feel that if ever any art can be called pure, this deserves the name, because these limpid, apparently effortless songs distil imaginative experience into the purest possible essence.

Of this rare art the Portuguese poet, Gil Vicente (c. 1470-c. 1540), is an indisputable master. Among his plays are scattered not only many fragments of popular songs but some fifty more or less complete pieces, some in Portuguese, some in Castilian, some in a mixture of both languages.¹ They

¹ The songs are collected and translated by A. F. G. Bell, *Lyrics of Gil Vicente*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1921. An improved text of the Spanish pieces may be found in Dámaso Alonso, *Poesías de Gil Vicente*, Mexico, 1940.

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are all sung by characters on the stage and contribute in some degree to the dramatic action. Like Aristophanes and Shakespeare, Vicente was primarily a dramatist, and the composition of songs was for him a secondary, almost an accidental pursuit. But like them, he wrote songs of a wonderful lightness and sweetness, and in this respect we cannot but compare him with them, since they too drew upon a popular tradition which they transformed to their own purposes. But Vicente differs from Shakespeare in one respect and from Aristophanes in another, and these differences help to define the scope and character of his work. First, the songs of Shakespeare are pure songs, in that a character sings them and does nothing else, but in Vicente the song, as the stage directions and the remarks of the characters show, is accompanied by dancing and is usually sung by more than one singer. The difference of performance marks a difference of function. Vicente's songs belong to the dramatic action and do something for it, but Shakespeare's soar suddenly into the empyrean and are usually not so much elements necessary to the action as radiant interludes in it. In this respect Vicente's songs are closer to those of Aristophanes in the *Birds*, *Clouds*, and *Lysistrata*. They belong to the action and for a moment transform it with a new brightness and gaiety. None the less, though such a song is part of the complex activity of words, music, and dance which the Greeks called *μολπή*, it is also complete in itself, a rounded work of art with its own character and unity. It needs no reference to the dramatic action to explain it, but moves on the universal plane where essential poetry has its being.

Secondly, Vicente's songs are traditional in a way that those of Aristophanes and Shakespeare are not. Though all three poets presuppose a popular art, Vicente alone among them normally uses traditional sets of words as the basis for his own compositions. We can hardly doubt that, like Lope de Vega, Camoes, and Góngora after him, Vicente would pick up some familiar theme or *estribillo* and then develop it into new stanzas of his own making. Though some songs, like *Muy graciosa es la doncella* and *La fragua del amor*, are,

on Vicente's admission, entirely his own, this is unlikely to be true of all his songs, and in many his own contribution lay in the development of themes which he found ready to hand. This of course does not apply to those poems which are intimately connected with a contemporary occasion, like some of his *romances* or such a piece as *Por mayo era, por mayo*, which was sung for the birth of Prince Felipe in 1533, but in many other cases we must assume that Vicente starts from a traditional *estribillo* or a traditional refrain and then proceeds to build his own poem on it. His skill lies in making these themes his own and working the completed poems into his plays by many happy and appropriate touches. Though we can never be quite sure how much is his own work and how much comes from tradition, we naturally make our guesses, which may not always be far off the mark. In any case what matters is the complete poem in the shape which Vicente gives to it. To take a familiar theme and to make from it a new and beautiful poem is in its own way quite as difficult as to compose something entirely original.

Vicente's songs illustrate to an unusual degree what can be done by the inspired exploitation of a traditional technique. When he wrote, this tradition was already venerable. Behind the popular Portuguese and Spanish songs of his time lay a more ancient art of which traces have recently been discovered in Jewish songs of the eleventh century.¹ Though the main texts of these are in Hebrew, the refrains are in a primitive Spanish, and their manner and subjects forecast much that was to occupy singers of the Peninsula for the next few centuries and is not quite dead even to-day. But these Hebrew-Spanish poems are themselves derived from something even older. About 900 a Moorish poet called Mocádem, from Cabra near Cordova, composed the form called *zéjel*, in which a theme or *markaz* is given at the start and then followed by regular stanzas which develop it.² The form forecasts the later *villancico*, which Vicente often uses, and though the *zéjel* differs from the Hebrew-Spanish form by

¹ S. M. Stern, *Les Chansons mozarabes*, Palermo, 1954.

² G. Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People*, p. 26.

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placing a theme-stanza at the beginning of a poem, in general character the two kinds are sufficiently similar to denote a common origin. This may indeed be of a great antiquity, since in all essential qualities these songs which rely so much on refrains may be found in most countries and are remarkably similar in structure to pieces in the Chinese *Book of Songs*, which are at least as old as the eighth century before Christ. At this primitive stage the refrain is the most important thing in a poem. It clinches the significance of the occasion and dominates the whole song. The next stage comes when, as with the Moorish *zêjels* or the Hebrew-Spanish pieces, the refrain is made the basis for something more complex and more elaborate which allows greater freedom of invention to the poet. In essence traditional Spanish and Portuguese poetry is of this kind, in that it relies largely on repetitions and especially on refrains. This was the art which Vicente inherited and practised, and his skill in adapting it shows the measure of his genius.

Vicente follows both Portuguese and Spanish models and understands their character and possibilities. In Portuguese he found the *cossante*, in which couplets end with a repeated refrain, alternate assonance is used, and there is a slow, unwinding movement suited to the regular motions of a dance. The form had been used with great effect in the thirteenth century, when such a piece as Nuno Fernandes Torneol's *alvorada*, or dawn-song, shows how much passion and sweetness can be conveyed in this apparently artless measure. Vicente applies it both to Spanish and to Portuguese, and his graceful mastery of it can be seen in the Christmas Carol from *Auto da Feira* :

Branca estais e colorada,
Virgem sagrada!

Em Belem, villa do amor,
Da rosa naceo a flor,
Virgem sagrada!

Em Belem villa do amar,
Naceo a rosa do rosal,
Virgem sagrada!

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Da rosa naceo a flor,
Jesus nosso Salvador,
Virgem sagrada!

Naceo a rosa do rosal,
Deos e homem natural,
Virgem sagrada!
(2 Bell)

(White art thou and fair of hue,
Holy Virgin!

In Bethlehem, town of love, this hour
Of the rose is born a flower,
Holy Virgin!

In Bethlehem, love's own city,
A rose is born of a rose-tree,
Holy Virgin!

Of the rose is born a flower,
Jesus Christ our Saviour,
Holy Virgin!

A rose is born of a rose-tree,
God and natural man to be,
Holy Virgin!)

The refrain sets the theme of the poem, and though the rest is indeed of a great simplicity, it has in its limited space its own little development and progression. Though the *cossante* is derived from the dance, it allows just this amount of expansion to the informing idea; and though the climax comes quietly and gently, it is none the less a climax and gives a sense of completeness and finality.

Vicente also uses the favourite Spanish form of the *villancico*, in which the theme is first stated as an *estribillo*, which includes the refrain, and then developed into longer, regular stanzas. This allows rather more freedom of invention than the *cossante*, since, if the poet keeps to the main theme and repeats its refrain at the end of each verse, he can say what he pleases, though of course it must agree in tone and character with the start. He has, moreover, a wider choice of rhymes than the stricter Portuguese scheme allows.

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Vicente was much attached to this form, and an example will show his handling of it:

Halcón que se atreve
Con garza guerrera,
Peligros espera.

Halcón que'se vuela
Con garza a porfia,
Cazarla quería,
Y no la recela.
Mas quien no se vela
De garza guerrera,
Peligros espera.

La caza de amor
Es de altanería :
Trabajos de día,
De noche dolor.
Halcón cazador
Con garza tan fiera,
Peligros espera.
(49 Bell, 12 Alonso)

(The falcon that dares
With heron to fight
Has danger in sight.

The falcon that flies
And with heron would race,
So keen on the chase
That not hidden it lies,
But still with it vies
And fears not its might,
Has danger in sight.

And the chase of love
Is high falconry,
That by day misery,
By night sorrows prove.
The falcon that strove
With heron in flight
Has danger in sight.)
(A. F. G. Bell)

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The Spanish *villancico* is a distant but recognisable descendant of the Moorish *zéjel*, and perhaps this ancestry accounts for its being more formal and more disciplined than the Portuguese *cossante*. Time and use have shaped its character, pruned away some of its too artless elements, and enabled it to reflect the peculiar Spanish dignity. But it is none the less a measure of airy song, and this is what Vicente appreciates and exploits with tact and grace. His song is no mere folk song and shows no traces of the uncertain texture of popular poetry. In taking over the old form he treats it seriously and makes every word tell.

Vicente's use of the refrain lies midway between its primitive emphasis and the more sophisticated control which we find, for instance, in Aristophanes. In the primitive stage the refrain is really all that matters, the constant element to which the singers add what they choose but still give pride of place to it. It carries the whole poem with it, and what is added is usually no more than simple amplification, sometimes not very distinguished and intended mainly to stress what the refrain says. In such conditions the refrain itself must have an immediate appeal, a dominating distinction, which captures the attention at once and holds it through the song. Such refrains are passed from generation to generation and used by countless poets, whose own task is no more than to provide their own new variations on them. Once indeed Vicente conforms to this ancient practice. One of the oldest subjects for European song is the coming of spring, and the festivals of May are responsible for much in early traditional poetry. Vicente, in *Auto da Lusitania*, makes May a character and sing such a song :

Este é Maio, o Maio é este,
Este é Maio e floresce.
Este é Maio das rosas,
Este é Maio das formosas,
Este é Maio e floresce,
Este é Maio das flores,
Este é Maio dos amores,
Este é Maio e floresce.

(I Bell)

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(May is here, yes, May is here,
May is here and all aflower,
May is here with roses laden,
May is here with many a maiden,
May is here and all aflower,
May is here and flowers blow,
May is here with loves aglow,
May is here and all aflower.)

The refrain *este é Maio* is the essence of the poem, and everything else is an amplification of it.

At the other extreme, when a cultivated poet takes up a primitive form with a refrain, he naturally tries to make the rest of the poem do its full share of work, and in this he may reduce the refrain to no more than a charming appendage. It still strikes a note or gives a hint or shows what kind of poem this is, but it contributes very little to the main subject. This is what Aristophanes does in a little wedding-song, in which he does indeed close each of the two stanzas with the traditional 'Ἕμην ὦ Ἕμέναι' ὦ, 'Hymen, O Hymenaios' (*Birds*, 1738-9), but the rest tells with decorative details of the marriage of Zeus and Hera and is more highly individualised than any primitive Greek marriage-song would have been. Shakespeare does something of the same kind with his refrains in *When that I was and a little tiny boy*, where he introduces them as accessory decorations, but more often, as in Amiens' songs in *As You Like It* or the Fairies' Lullaby in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, he uses a full refrain which is indispensable not merely to the tone of the song but to its meaning and purpose. This, too, is what Vicente does. Between the primitive predominance of the refrain and the sophisticated reduction of it to an appendage he keeps a happy mean.

Vicente's refrains have the richness of phrases which have been perfected by generations and survive because of their concentrated poetry. So even when he invents one of his own, it must have the same air of ripeness, and such he provides in a poem which is entirely of his own composition :

El que quisiere apurarse
Véngase muy sin temor
A la fragua del Amor.
(44 Bell, 18 Alonso)

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(Let him venture unafraid
Who would his soul's temper prove
On this forge, the forge of love.)

The third line of this *estribillo* is the key to the song, and on it Vicente builds his delicate structure. When it recurs at the end of each verse, it reminds us of the central topic and keeps us to it. A refrain, as Vicente uses it, sets the tone for a poem and dictates terms to it. So when he sings of a garden in which a young man imagines his beloved :

Para mirar al ruiseñor
Cómo cantaba,
(26 Bell, 11 Alonso)

(To listen to the nightingale,
How it sings its song,)

or makes a maiden say that she refuses to be wedded :

Dicen que me case yo ;
No quiero marido, no,
(51 Bell, 4 Alonso)

(They would have me wed, but I
Truly for no husband sigh.)
(A. F. G. Bell)

he conveys in the fewest possible words a self-contained world of fancy, an atmosphere and a situation, which need no explanation and take us at once to the heart of the moment. It is impossible not to be captivated by such refrains. Even if they are traditional and familiar, they are still rich in associations and possibilities of development, and it is not surprising that Vicente was carried away by them and built his own songs on them.

Once he has found his refrain, Vicente adapts and expands it into a complete poem. In such a task the tone is of first importance. What follows must maintain absolutely the note set at the start. This is where popular song too often breaks down. It discovers some wonderful opening, but is unable to maintain the full, right tone to the finish. Conversely, it is possible to ask too much from a traditional formula, to make the variations on it carry too heavy a load of meaning,

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and so to spoil its charm by making it look insignificant. Between these two perils Vicente steers an unfaltering course. His expansion of a theme is perfectly related to the tone set at the start, even though he puts it in a new context and gives it a reference for which it was not originally intended. For instance, Vicente uses a theme of maidens weary with travelling, and we may assume that originally it conveyed no more than this. But he gives it an unusual setting in a song of sea-nymphs :

Qual de nos vem mais cansada
Nesta cansada Jornada ?
Qual de nos vem mais cansada ?

Nosso mar é fortunoso,
Nosso viver lacrimoso,
E o chegar rigoroso
Ao cabo desta Jornada.
Qual de nos vem mais cansada
Nesta cansada Jornada ?

Nos partimos caminhando,
Com lagrimas suspirando,
Sem saber como nem quando
Fará fim nossa Jornada.
Qual de nos vem mais cansada,
Nesta cansada Jornada ?

(7 Bell)

(Which of us the weariest
Has upon this journey pressed ?
Which of us the weariest ?

For our sea is full of fears,
And our life is full of tears,
Hard the end of it appears
When our journey comes to rest.
Which of us the weariest
Has upon this journey pressed ?

Forth we start upon our way,
Weeping, sighing, nor can say
How or when will come the day
When our journey ends in rest.
Which of us the weariest
Has upon this journey pressed ?)

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If we assume that the *estribillo* is traditional, we can see how skilfully Vicente develops it in the next two stanzas. He makes the theme perfectly appropriate to his voyaging nymphs by hinting at the risks and labours of life in the sea, but he goes beyond this specific meaning to something familiar in many situations, to the suggestion that almost all existence is a perilous and wearisome voyage. So the old theme with its limited significance is both woven into the play and given a greater breadth and humanity.

Even when Vicente does not use a refrain, he still maintains this unity of tone and in so doing obeys an ancient law of song. Any true song aims at creating a single, simple effect. Even such a miracle as *Hark, hark the lark* does no more than express in the highest possible degree the delight which anyone may feel in the dawn of a spring day. By eliminating everything but the most essential matter, and by concentrating all its powers on this, such a song creates its effect, which is immediate, complete, and absorbing. It reflects no more than a moment, and gives no more than a moment to it, but this instantaneous enchantment must be absolutely harmonious, broken by no after-thoughts or misgivings or disturbing considerations. Above all its temper must be maintained without any slackening of tension. The whole essence of the magical minute must be caught and portrayed. It is a sudden illumination, an instant of god-given music, a catch in the breath, a beat of the heart. This the song must give, and nothing else is needed. If it tries to do too much, our response is uncertain and hesitant; if it gives too little, we may fail to respond at all. The poet must strike exactly the right note and maintain it throughout.

Vicente's skill in this exacting task may be illustrated by two poems, the one extremely simple, the other, for him at least, rather elaborate. The first is a *serranilha*, in which both the subject and the form are traditional and even conventional. In all *serranilhas* the singer meets a beautiful shepherdess and makes love to her, and such is Vicente's subject here. His form is a simple scheme of couplets, in which the first line of each repeats the second line of the preceding. All that matters is the situation :

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A serra é alta, fria e nevosa,
Vi venir serrana gentil, graciosa.

Vi venir serrana gentil, graciosa,
Cheguei-me a ela com gran cortesia.

Cheguei-me a ela de gran cortesia.
Disse-lhe : Senhora, quereis companhia ?

Disse-lhe : Senhora, quereis companhia ?

Disse-me : Escudeiro, segui vossa via.

(4 Bell)

(On the high mountains the cold snows lie,
A sweet fair hill-maiden I saw pass by.

A sweet fair hill-maiden I saw pass by,
Towards her I went with great courtesy.

Towards her I went with great courtesy,
I said : 'Wish you, lady, my company ?'

I said : 'Wish you, lady, my company ?'

She said : ' Sir knight, go your way without me.')

Vicente's *serranilha* differs equally from those of the Arch-priest of Hita and those of the Marqués de Santillana. If the first of these displays a pungent, realistic satire and the second a masculine confidence and gaiety, Vicente aims only at poetry. He has reduced his song to the absolute minimum and put into it nothing that is not essential. Because he is so economical, his repeated lines are all the more necessary, to make each separate point clear and draw special attention to it. The first couplet gives the setting, the second the opening move in the knight's progress, the third his stylish gallantry, the fourth his rebuff. All lead up to the delightful, whimsical, unexpected end and create the atmosphere for it. This is as far from the uncertain touch of popular song as we could wish, and yet it is perfectly fresh and natural.

More elaborate and yet in the end no less single and pure in its effect is the song which Abel sings in *Auto da Historia de Deos*. Since Abel is a shepherd, he is easily assimilated to the pastoral tradition, and his song is a *vilancete*. Perhaps Vicente owed his first idea of it to a song in Lucas Fernández's *Comedia*, published in 1514, but it is equally likely that both

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poets followed popular tradition, and in any case Vicente's piece is far more lively and relevant than that of Fernandez. He catches the mood of the young shepherd as he adores his God, and shows how his simple and sincere faith is inevitably bound up with his pastoral occupation :

Adorae montanhas
O Deos das alturas,
Tambem as verduras.

Adorae desertos
E serras floridas
O Deos dos secretes,
O Senhor das vidas ;
Ribeiras crescidas
Louvae nas alturas
Deos das creaturas.

Louvae arvoredos
De frutos presado,
Digam os penedos;
Deos seja louvado,
E louve meu gado
Nestas verduras
O Deos das alturas.

(8 Bell)

(Worship, O mountains,
The god of the height,
In him, fields, delight.

Ye deserts, adore,
Ye flowering hills,
The Lord who earth fills
With life evermore.
Praise him, swelling rills,
Praise him upon high
Who made all 'neath the sky

With fruits' rich stock,
Ye forests, him praise,
Ye mountainous ways
And every rock;
And praise him, my flock,
In him, fields, delight,
The god of the height.)

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The success of this poem owes much to its complete fusion of the pastoral theme and the religious temper. The mood of praise suggests the Bible, but the poem passes beyond any such special association into a region where delighted worship derives strength from a single, enthralled mood. Here, as in the narrower scope of the *serranilha*, Vicente moves with effortless ease. The slightest slip would ruin the effect, but Vicente's concentration on the essence of the subject and his impeccable tact achieve a perfectly sustained tone.

The traditional character of Vicente's forms is matched at times by an imagery no less traditional. In many countries folk-song tends to make use of certain fixed images, which are in themselves so rich in association and suggestion that they need no amplification but go at once to the point and meet all its needs. Vicente inherited such images and turned them to his own purposes, often passing beyond their primary use to something more subtle and more significant. For instance, the apple has immemorially been associated with love, and it is not only in Greece that the lover throws an apple at his beloved or gives her one as a gift. The same idea existed in Portugal, and Vicente uses it in *Um amigo que eu havia*, where a girl tells how her lover has sent her golden apples. There perhaps we might expect the poem to end, but in the third stanza Vicente takes the subject a step further :

Manganas d'ouro m'envia,
A melhor era partida.
Garrido amor!

(16 Bell)

(Apples of gold he sent to me,
The best was cleft for all to see.
Oh lovely love!)

The cleft apple reveals the honesty of the lover's intention, and the maiden at once sees its significance. The old image is given a new point and exploited beyond its original bounds, and this makes the poem more dramatic. Again, falcons are a common image for lovers in mediaeval poetry. So the Minnesinger, Der von Klirenberg, tells how he rears a falcon and lets him loose, but the falcon returns tied with silken

cords, and the poet prays that dear friends may be held together in the same way.¹ Vicente uses the image, simply enough, in *A mi seguem dous açores*, where the maiden speaks of her two lovers as falcons, but adds an unexpected touch when she says that one of them will die. In *Halcón que se atreve* the image is further developed. This time the falcon competes not with another falcon but with a heron, and the song stresses the danger that such a rivalry breeds. The traditional image starts with the advantage of being familiar to everyone, and, when the poet puts it into a slightly new context or makes more of it than usual, he enriches his poem by a small surprise.

Commoner than the image of the apple or the falcon is that of the rose, which indeed abounds in all mediaeval poetry. It stands for what is rare and beautiful, and is often associated with love, whether human or divine. Vicente uses it in the traditional way for the infant Jesus (2 Bell) and recalls such pieces as the English :

There is no rose of switch vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu.

No less traditionally he associates roses with the beloved and sets his beautiful maidens among them, whether 'num rosal florido' (11 Bell) or more elaborately in a garden by the water where the nightingales sing (26 Bell, 11 Alonso). But once at least he goes beyond common use when, in *Triunfo do inverno*, he makes Spring sing a song about a beautiful rose-garden. The song is uncommonly like a love-song and plays with roses as images of love and youth. But while it begins as any such love-song might, it soon introduces a slightly different note :

Viera estar rosal florido,
Cogì rosas con suspiro :
Vengo del rosale.
(23 Bell, 25 Alonso)

(That garden bloomed before my eyes,
Those roses did I pick with sighs,
I come from the rose-garden.)

¹ *Oxford Book of German Verse*, No. 6.

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By treating spring with an imagery commonly used for love, Vicente stresses how closely connected and indeed how inseparable the two are. Each has all too brief a beauty, and each may be said to spoil its own joy. Vicente might have written about spring without any such associations, but by treating it in the language of love he creates a new charm and pathos.

Even in a poem which is indubitably from his own hand Vicente maintains his connection with tradition. In the love-song from *Auto da Sebila Casandra* he follows the pattern of a *cantiga* by stating his theme and developing it without recourse to a full refrain, though each verse begins and ends with the repeated phrases and the three verses are in some sense parallel and complementary to one another :

Muy graciosa es la doncella,
j cómo es bella y hermosa!

Digas tú, el marinero
Que en las naves vivías,
Si la nave o la vela
O la estrella es tan bella.

Digas tú, el caballero
Que las armas vestías,
Si el caballo o las armas
O la guerra es tan bella.

Digas tú, el pastorcico
Que el ganadico guardas,
Si el ganado o los valles
O la sierra es tan bella.
(34 Bell, 7 Alonso)

.

(How comely the maiden,
How lovely and fair!

Now tell me, thou sailor,
Whose life's on the sea,
If ship, sail or star
Is so fair as she.

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And tell me, thou knight,
Wont in arms to be,
If horse, arms or war
Is so fair as she.

Tell me, shepherd boy,
Who keepest the sheep,
If flock, hill or valley
Is so fair as she.)

The poem is constructed on a 'rule of three'. In turn the three figures of sailor, soldier, and shepherd are addressed, and in each address three things are mentioned — ship, sail, and star for the first; horse, arms, and war for the second ; and flock, hill, and valley for the third. This is itself a traditional elegance, made more elegant by Vicente's choice of details. But equally traditional is the comparison of some career of action with the delights of love. Something akin may be found in a poem by Sappho :

οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖν' ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν
ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅτ-
τω τις ἔραται.

(fr. 27, 1-4, Diehl)

(On the black earth, say some, the thing most lovely
Is a host of horsemen, or some, foot-soldiers,
Others say, of ships, but I — whatsoever
Anyone loveth.)

Sappho develops her theme more thoroughly than Vicente, and understandably, since she speaks of a powerful personal passion. But like him, she chooses three objects which ordinarily excite admiration for their beauty — horsemen, foot-soldiers, and ships — and sets against these her own choice of the loved one. Both his poem and hers are built on the idea that there is a fundamental difference between the glories and splendours of active life on the one side and the enchantments of love on the other. No doubt this is an ancient way of approaching a familiar problem, and Vicente, like Sappho, uses the artifice to drive his point home.

In such ways Vicente uses the resources of tradition for a

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poetry which is always fresh and graceful and gay. The popular art of song which he put to his own uses allowed a wide range of substance and effect, and, if it insisted on the elimination of the unessential, it allowed a considerable variety in its subjects. But sometimes Vicente was forced by his dramatic needs to pass beyond the round of traditional subjects, and then a problem called for solution. No doubt he could, like the Marqués de Santillana, have adopted the new measures of Italian verse, but he preferred to pursue his usual manner and to adapt it to his new needs. So, when in *Auto da Sebila Casandra* he decided to write a song for one of the periodical Portuguese expeditions to Africa, he had not only to find a form for a subject which was hardly treated at all by popular song, but to accommodate his matter to the current notion that such expeditions were crusades, in which God and His Saints fought on the side of the Christians against the infidels. The result is a stirring little piece, 'fit for the gaiety of Mozart', a *vilancete* in traditional form adapted to the high crisis :

i A la guerra,
Caballeros esforzados!
Pues los ángeles sagrados
A socorro son en tierra,
i A la guerra!

Con armas resplandecientes
Vienen del cielo volando,
Dios y Hombre apellidando
En socorro de las gentes.

i A la guerra,
Caballeros esmerados!
Pues los ángeles sagrados
A socorro son en tierra,
j A la guerra!

(43 Bell, 8 Alonso)

.
(Go forth to fight,
Knights in gallant companies!
Holy angels from the skies
Come to swell our earthly might.
Go forth to fight!

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Girt in shining armour flies
From the sky the warrior-van,
Calling upon God and Man,
Succouring our enterprise.

Go forth to fight,
Knights in noble companies!
Holy angels from the skies
Come to swell our earthly might.
Go forth to fight!)

At first sight we might think that this is almost too light and too airy for its heroic, Christian occasion. But Vicente avoids this danger by his choice of words which are more resonant and more weighty than usual and stir echoes of power and glory. By this means he proclaims the spirit of exaltation which should inspire the Portuguese soldiers, and the sense of a divinely guided destiny which is theirs.

The age in which Vicente lived saw the beginnings of a new poetry of the self and its emotions. The old art of song was still honoured, but in Italy and Spain a more complex spirit called for expression. Compared with the old songs the new poems are stately and self-conscious and rich in emotional effects. Indeed their aim was to bring far more emotion into play than traditional simplicity allowed. If Vicente usually implies a rich reserve of emotion, he none the less keeps it in strong control, and passes beyond it to express what can only be called joy, though it is in fact the final exaltation which is the gift of all great art. The new poetry wished to produce fuller, more passionate, more complex, and more impressive effects and evolved its own means for doing so, notably a weightier emphasis and a more elaborate exploitation of imaginative tropes. Vicente was aware of this movement and at times came near to making his own contributions to it. For instance, a song sung by a shepherdess in *Auto pastoril portugues* is not in his normal crystalline manner, but more heavily charged with meaning, and of a bolder and more unusual fancy :

Tirae os olhos de mim,
Minha vida e meu descanso,
Que me estais namorando.

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Os vossos olhos, senhora,
Senhora de formosura,
Por cada momento de hora
Dam mil anos de tristura.
Temo de nam ter ventura,
Vida, nam me esteis olhando,
Que me estais namorando.

(14 Bell)

(Take you eyes away from me,
O my life and consolation,
In me you awake such passion.

Your eyes, lady, give such greeting,
To such loveliness they call me,
That for every hour that's fleeting
Myriad years of grief appal me.
May such failure not befall me.
Lady, why look in this fashion?
In me you awake such passion.)

This is Vicente's counterpart to *Take, oh take those lips away*, and though he cannot but be worsted in any such comparison, his little poem has its own passion and power. Even if we, who are accustomed to his usual manner, feel that he was wrong to abandon it for this with its high pressure, its emphasis, and its ingenuity, yet we cannot deny that he has mastered the new style and done justice to it.

The new poetry also aimed at a majestic and ornamental splendour, which is more in keeping with the Spanish than with the Portuguese temper and no doubt owed its popularity to the courtly, Catholic temper of Castile. This, too, Vicente understood and once or twice turned into poetry. At the end of *Auto da Barca do Purgatório* three angels sing a *romance*, and though the *romance* is hardly pure song in our sense, this short and lyrical piece has so much in common with song that it may be taken to illustrate how Vicente manages the new, high style :

Remando vam remadores
Barca de grande alegia;
O patrão que a guiava
Filho de Deus se dizia;

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Anjos eram os remeiros
Que remavam a porfía;
Estandarte d'esperança:
ó quam bem que parecia!
O masto da fortaleza
Como cristal reluzia;
A vela com fe cosida
Todo o mundo esclarecia.
A ribeira mui serena
Que nenhum vento bolia!

(5 Bell)

.
(Rowers now come rowing
A boat of great delight;
The helmsman who was steering
The Son of God is hight;
Angels were the rowers,
Who rowed with all their might;
Its standard is Hope uplifted,
How beautiful a sight!
The mast is the mast of Courage
And is as crystal bright.
The sail of Faith is fashioned
And to all the world gives light.
Upon the peaceful waters
No breath of wind may light.)

Here Vicente seems to have abandoned his traditional images for allegory. His picture of the ship corresponds, point for point, with major elements in the Christian faith, and we might think the result a little forced and artificial. So perhaps it is, and yet this artificiality has its own grace and splendour. It suits the high subject and shows how rare and unusual it is. Indeed these glittering images form not so much an allegory as a consistent scheme of symbols, each of which not only fits easily into the main picture but gives a vivid, visual impression of realities which would otherwise be abstract and dim and shapeless. Vicente's theme lies outside his usual range, and he is right to take unusual steps to present it. His bold experiment reveals his delight in so glorious a mystery and celebrates it in majestic pride.

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Though Vicente saw the beginnings of a period of elaboration in poetry and even made his own contributions to it, he belonged to the last stage of a period of simplicity and won his most characteristic successes by applying its standards and methods. His management of traditional popular forms, with all its delicacy and refinement, has nothing sophisticated about it. He likes them not because they are traditional or have some antique charm, but because they respond to something in himself and suit his own imaginative outlook. His dramas show how well he understood the common people and how warmly he shared their feelings, and his songs are a natural result of this. He applied to their composition the discrimination of a great master, but he was none the less a popular singer in his tastes and his poetical vision. His is a truly living speech, not only in the sense that there is nothing artificial or 'literary' about it, but in the wider sense that he uses just those words which men and women would wish to use in moments of illumination or exalted joy. The essential quality of his songs is that they move so lightly and so easily, with words so fresh and so lively, that their effect is instantaneous and complete. They convey in flawless form the all-absorbing excitement which comes from untrammelled inspiration. Through them we share in the celestial exaltation which belongs to a perfect moment of insight and music, to the concentration of our whole selves on something rare and rapturous and entirely satisfying. Vicente's wide understanding of human character and his ready delight in many of its aspects enabled him not only to be a dramatist, but to pass beyond mere drama to the universal states of mind which lie behind its assumptions and conventions. The abundant life which he saw and enjoyed around him inspired him to an ecstatic joy which found its expression in the soaring sweep of irresistible song.

VI

'SAMSON AGONISTES'

WHEN in *Paradise Regained* Satan shows the Saviour a vision of Athens and praises its achievements in literature and philosophy, he pays special honour to Attic tragedy :

Thence what the lofty grave Tragoedians taught
In *Chorus* or *Iambic*, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life ;
High actions, and high passions best describing.
(iv, 261-6)

The Saviour is not moved by this eloquent appeal but answers that reading is anyhow dangerous for those whose minds are not equal or superior to what they read and that, when he himself wishes to solace his private hours with poetry, he prefers that of the Hebrews.¹ To such a conclusion was Milton brought at the Restoration by the failure of his hopes for a millennium and by his depressed decision that the only desirable life was one of withdrawal and self-denial. In making the Saviour reject Satan's plea for Greece Milton denied what had been one of the most powerful influences in his own intellectual and creative life. In severing himself from the world he was prepared to make the utmost sacrifices and to betray even his earliest and most devoted love. It is therefore a delightful surprise to find that in the same year as *Paradise Regained*, 1671, and in the same volume, Milton published *Samson Agonistes*, which is written in the strict manner of Attic tragedy with respectful attention to all its

¹ That the Saviour reflects Milton's own views is clear from the statement in the anonymous 'Life', in H. Darbishire, *Early Lives of Milton*, p. 33, 'And David's Psalms were in esteem with him above all poetry'.

peculiar rules and conventions. Milton justifies the choice by the example of wise men who have enjoyed and written tragedy, and summons to his support St. Paul, who quotes Euripides, and Gregory Nazianzen, who is credited with the *Christus Patiens*, a sacred drama written in Greek iambics largely looted from the Attic tragedians. When Milton made the Saviour reject Greek poetry, it was the reflection of a transient mood of defeat. He soon recovered his confidence and with it his old interest in Greek poetry.

The reasons for this recovery are not known, but there is no doubt of it. In *Samson* Milton has rediscovered his taste for action and abandoned the quietism of *Paradise Regain'd*. The admiration which he feels for Samson's triumph over his enemies, and his unconcealed pleasure in it, mirror his own feelings. He, who was blind and among enemies, had not after all surrendered his hopes of retribution and victory. He had passed through dark years when little seemed to him of value except an inner life of self-denial; now his spirits revived, and with them his creative impulses revived too and found sustenance in the Greek poetry which he had loved since Cambridge days. The idea of an English tragedy on a Greek model appealed to him in more than one way. He had long thought of something of the kind, and in 1642, when he wrote *Reason of Church Government*, he wondered 'whether those dramatic constitutions wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation' than an epic whether long or short. He had now written his epics both long and short, and his mind, which was curiously tenacious of projects once formed, reverted to the idea of a tragedy. Secondly, protected by the objective form of drama and helped by the respect which his generation felt for anything classical, Milton could say certain things which could not be safely expressed in the first person by a rebel and a regicide. Personal tastes conspired with circumstances to turn Milton's reviving spirits to this austere form. It is true that he found his subject not in Greek myth but in the Bible, but that was inevitable in one who insisted that the subjects of poetry must be historically true. (As a Christian moralist he had to satisfy his conscience, but as a

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poet he followed what he held to be the best models.)

The model which Milton seems to have had most vividly in mind was the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles. The two plays are of about the same length, *Samson* having 1758 lines and *Oedipus at Colonus* 1778. Both tell how a blind man, who after knowing great glory has been hideously humbled, ends his days in power and triumph. Both are constructed on almost the same plan, which is uncommon among extant Attic tragedies. The chief character is continuously on the stage until near the end, when he departs to his death, which is reported by a Messenger. There is hardly a plot in any real sense, but a series of separate episodes, which consist for the most part of colloquies between Oedipus or Samson and a variety of characters who enter, say their say, and depart. There are even points of resemblance between individual colloquies. Samson refuses to listen to Dalila or to accept her excuses, as Oedipus refuses to trust or forgive Polynices ; and Samson's treatment of the boastful bully, Harapha, has some likeness to Oedipus' relentless treatment of the brutal Creon. It was to this play written by Sophocles at the end of his long life that Milton turned for a model when, feeling that his own days were almost numbered, he made his last protest for his beliefs.

Milton's debt to Sophocles extends beyond these obvious resemblances to others which are more subtle and show how well he understood Sophoclean art. The first concerns what may be called the tragic consummation. Just as Aristotle recognises that a tragedy can treat of a change either from good fortune to bad or from bad fortune to good, so Sophocles illustrates both kinds in his work. If the *Women of Trachis* and *King Oedipus* illustrate the first kind, *Electra* and *Philoctetes* illustrate the second. But *Oedipus at Colonus* illustrates neither, or both. For while it ends with what is for all practical purposes the death of Oedipus and his daughters' lamentation for it, this is at the same time a reward and a requital for his sufferings. (Grief and triumph are indistinguishably mingled. The same is true of *Samson*. Before the end Samson is dead, and his death, when it is first reported, brings grief to his old father. But this death is also

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an occasion for pride, and Manoa sees that he should be pleased with his son's last great labour :

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause, *Samson* hath quit himself
Like *Samson*, and heroically hath finish'd
A life Heroic, on his Enemies
Fully reveng'd. •

(1708-12)

Grief and triumph are perhaps less closely intertwined than in *Oedipus at Colonus*, but both contribute to the final effect and give to it an unusual character.

This consummation is pressed more closely than we might expect from a poet of Milton's views. In *Oedipus at Colonus* the old Oedipus passes into the earth, where he will live as a *δαίμων* or demi-god, whose task is to watch over Attica from the sunless realm where he dwells. Such a destiny was of course out of the question for Samson, but Milton goes as near as he dares to it. It is not enough for him that Samson has died heroically ; his sacrifice deserves an abiding memory and must be honoured by some cult or ceremony. Much as Milton disliked all outward forms of religion and anything that savoured of ritual, he was in this case prepared to make some concession and to allow to his Jewish hero the kind of posthumous survival which the Greeks accorded to their great men. After saying that he will fetch Samson's body to his home, Manoa continues :

• there will I build him
A Monument, and plant it round with shade
Of Laurel ever green, and branching Palm,
With all his Trophies hung, and Acts enroll'd
In copious Legend, or sweet Lyric Song.
Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
And from his memory inflame thir breasts
To matchless valour, and adventures high.

(1733-40)

Milton could go no further than this, and it is indeed far for him to go. Like Sophocles, he believes that the great man, who has given away his life, will continue after death to strengthen and sustain his countrymen.

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A second parallel between Milton and Sophocles is no less remarkable. In *Oedipus at Colonus* Oedipus increases in power and personality as his end draws near. He shows signs of becoming a demi-god, and, as he does so, becomes more authoritative and formidable, until he hears thunder calling from the sky and goes, despite his blindness, unaided to his end. Something of the same kind happens to Samson. At the beginning of the play he is a slave at the mill and feels that through his own wanton act he has squandered the wonderful strength which God gave him. As Manoa says, he is

now unequal match
To save himself against a coward arm'd
At one spears length.

(346-7)

But, as the play unfolds, Samson gradually finds his old strength. When Harapha contemptuously tells him that he is not worth fighting against, Samson replies that he is ready to fight, even though Harapha is fully armed :

I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee,
And raise such out-cries on thy clatter'd Iron,
Which long shall not with-hold mee from thy head,
That in a little time while breath remains thee,
Thou oft shalt wish thy self at *Gath* to boast
Again in safety what thou wouldst have done
To *Samson*, but shalt never see *Gath* more.

(1123-9)

Later, when Samson is summoned by the Publick Officer to the concourse of the Philistines, and at first refuses to go, he soon changes his mind, because something within him tells him that he must. Like Oedipus, he is impelled by a divine force which he does not understand but knows that he must obey :

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.

(1381-3)

When he finds himself among the Philistines, Samson's strength has returned in full and enables him to wreak his

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vengeance on them. At the end his triumph comes from the power which God has given back to him.

So far Milton kept an eye on Sophocles and especially on *Oedipus at Colonus*. But not all his ideas fell into this plan, and in one important respect he departs from it. (He insists that Samson is largely responsible for his own sufferings, whereas Sophocles' Oedipus falls and suffers not from any fault of his own but because the gods will it So) Though Milton's Chorus may see in Samson's fall an example of the contrarious ways of God, Milton insists that it comes through his own fault. Even though he married Dalila at God's bidding, Samson knows that he is to blame for what happened afterwards and that he, and no one else, is responsible for betraying God's trust in him. In his opening soliloquy he is emphatic on this point. However much he may lament his pitiable state, he blames no one but himself :

Whom have I to complain of but my self ?

(46)

He tells the Chorus that he is like a foolish pilot who has shipwrecked his own vessel (188-200), and that not Dalila but he is to blame for his sufferings (233-6). He repeats the same idea with even more emphasis to Manoa :

Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
But justly; I my self have brought them on,
Sole Author I, sole cause.

(374-6)

He is so conscious of his fault, and so contrite for it, that he confesses it even to Harapha and claims that he deserves all, and more than all, his sorrows. Milton insists that Samson's sufferings are caused by his own wrong actions.

The nature of these actions is no less clear. (It is Samson's betrayal of the trust which God has put in him) He tells Manoa that the betrayal of a trust given by a man is bad enough, but this fault is worse :

But I Gods counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have publish'd, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully.

(497-9)

He has broken his solemn word to God, and that is his prime fault. The theme is perhaps not one that we might have expected from Milton, but it is worthy of him and his art. For by such a fault Samson breaks the harmony which should exist between him and God just as Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* break a similar harmony, when they disobey God by eating of the forbidden tree. This is Samson's tragic fault, and his tragic sufferings come from it. Just as in Sophocles' *Antigone* Creon violates his duty to the gods by refusing burial to Polynices, with the result that he is harshly punished and deeply humbled, so Samson, in breaking the solemn trust which God has placed in him, must also be punished and humbled. And just as in the end Creon learns humility and recognises that men are but dust and shadows before the gods, so too Samson has learned humility and, in the bitter consciousness of guilt, believes that he is of no account.:

If such is Samson's fault, the human motives for it are not far to seek. Concupiscence, as we might expect, plays its determining part. Milton was much too conscious of the appeal of women not to stress its influence on Samson's life, but he gives it a secondary or subsidiary part. The scheme is that Samson's fundamental fault was pride and that pride bred concupiscence. Samson recounts the sad story of his fall and its causes :

Fearless of danger, like a petty God
I walk'd about admir'd of all and dreaded
On hostile ground, none daring my affront.
Then swoll'n with pride into the snare I fell
Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,
Softn'd with pleasure and voluptuous life ;
At length to lay my head and hallow'd pledge
Of all my strength in the lascivious lap
Of a deceitful Concubine who shore me
Like a tame Weather, all my precious fleece,
Then turn'd me out ridiculous, despoil'd,
Shav'n and disarm'd among my enemies.

(529-40)

So Milton interprets the story. Because Samson was proud, he was a ready victim of women. Nor is this without plausi-

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bility. In Milton's view, Samson, by yielding to pride, has weakened his reason, and, once this happens, other faults assert themselves. Samson's feeble submission to Dalila is due immediately to a weakness of the flesh, but this rises from a weakness of the spirit, which assailed him when in the flush of his victories he ceased to remember that he was only a man.

In his conception of Samson's tragic flaw Milton follows a scheme simpler than any to be found in Shakespeare's tragedies. (When the great Shakespearian heroes totter and fall, their fall is not usually the reflection of their whole natures but of some quality upon which the malice of circumstances seizes to corrupt and ruin them. With Samson it is different. Pride is close to the very centre of his being. Becaitee he is a great warrior, he is proud ; for pride is the essence of the heroic type, and Milton makes Samson conform to it. In this again there is a resemblance to Sophocles. (The Sophoclean heroes, whether they come to happy or unhappy ends, are the victims of their own pre-eminent qualities. It is the fierce, destructive heroism of Ajax which makes him defy Athene and suffer an appropriate punishment in the madness in which he kills himself; it is the ruthless inhumanity of Heracles which makes him think nothing of his wife's love and prepares the way to death at her hands. Milton's Samson is like a Greek hero in more than one respect, but in none more than this, that his fall comes from the essence of his being, from the pride which has first made him a great warrior and then grown through success until it ruins him.

Yet, though Milton's presentation of his hero's tragic fault accords with good Greek practice, his dramatic use of it is his own. He begins the play at a point where Samson has not only finished with his errors but almost paid for them. If the task of suffering is to inculcate humility, as Milton thought that it was, this task is all but complete before the play begins. The pride, which subdues the reason, has been atoned with suffering, and Samson has been brought to acknowledge reason's supremacy. His mood is not passionate but subdued ; he has no resentment and no

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complaint against anyone but himself. He knows where his fault lies and that everyone else knows it:

Tell me Friends,
Am I not sung and proverb'd for a Fool
In every street, do they not say, how well
Are come upon him his deserts ? yet why ?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
This with the other should, at least, have paid,
These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse.
(202-9)

This is not the mood in which Heracles or Ajax makes his first appearance. Milton's drama starts at a point which Sophocles would normally have kept for a later stage. This means not *that* *Samson* is less dramatic than a Greek tragedy, but that its dramatic development is of a different kind.

We may perhaps surmise why Milton presented his story in this way. *Samson* depicts a special kind of *περιπέτεια* or reversal of fortune, the importance of which Milton learned from Aristotle. In this case the reversal is from humiliation to power and glory, and to this process Samson's faults are not immediately relevant. They have indeed created the situation in which he recognises his utter helplessness, but the task of the play begins with that recognition. If Milton had made more ado about Samson's faults, he would have had not one theme but two, first, the story of the proud man humbled, then of the humbled man exalted. For artistic reasons, if for no other, Milton was compelled to limit his theme in this way and to start it at this point. Nor need we question his choice of such a theme. When he wrote *Samson*, he had something to say which deeply concerned himself. Had he not also in his day known power and smitten the Philistines ? Had he not been the victim of women's wiles and spoiled much of his life by his surrender of reason to appetite ? Had he not known the sufferings of the blind, the outcast, and the oppressed, whose humiliation was the more bitter because he believed that he was the chosen of

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the Lord and that his enemies were idolaters and unclean ? And finally, had he not in his heart longed for some manifestation of the Divine Will which should make him the instrument of a prodigious vengeance and a sublime regeneration ? The theme of *Samson* was almost forced on Milton by his own experience and circumstances, and, once he began to work at it, he saw that he must exclude from its action anything which interfered with the straightforward development of his essential subject.

Milton's theme is the exaltation of the humbled Samson, and it needs all his skill to make it dramatic, since the kind of humility which he depicts in Samson is closely allied to the rejection of worldly ambitions which informs *Paradise Regain'd*. In such a state not only is revenge out of place but the desire for action and glory is itself untenable. Milton had recovered his taste for action, and knew what it was to move from passive acceptance to active enterprise. But he had to make Samson do the same. Such a process must both be psychologically convincing and accord with Milton's own exacting ethics. He must show how life revives in Samson until he is once again a hero, and at the same time he must make this revival reflect not heroic pride but devotion to God. For Milton Samson's final vengeance on the Philistines was right beyond cavil or casuistry. But, once he assumed that Samson's original fault was pride, he had to make his last exploit come from some reputable motive. He meets this need in the series of scenes which precede Samson's departure to the Philistine festival. In them Samson regains his heroic magnificence and conforms to Milton's strictest standards of conduct.

In the first scene, between Samson and the Chorus, Samson is subdued to so humble a condition that he thinks himself incapable of any great action. But he soon shows signs of recovery. The Chorus, who speak as ordinary men, suggest that all his noble efforts in the past have been of little avail, since his people are still in servitude to the Philistines. In answer to this Samson not only justifies his own actions against those of the rulers of Israel by showing that the present situation is due to their lack of foresight and their

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deafness to his warnings, but strikes a more confident note which goes to the heart of the matter :

But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
And by thir vices brought to servitude,
Than to love Bondage more than Liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous Liberty.

(268-71)

By this noble stroke Milton secures two ends. First, he shows how Samson, despite his humiliations, is still at heart a great man of action, capable of facing serious issues and maintaining powerful convictions. The mention of his country's state stirs him to life and makes him forget his own troubles. Secondly, the old love of glory for its own sake has been transformed into love of country. No doubt we are expected to assume that Samson has always loved his country, but his love for it has been corrupted by his love for himself. Now he speaks in the language of exalted patriotism, such as Milton himself would share and approve.

In the following scene with Manoa Samson is subjected to a strong temptation, and his rejection of it shows his worth. Manoa is prepared to make considerable sacrifices that Samson may be ransomed and pass his remaining days peacefully at home. Samson refuses, for reasons which he gives in some detail. He repudiates his father's suggestion that perhaps he will recover his sight and strength. So far from thinking this likely, he feels that he is near his end :

So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of her self;
My race of glory run, and race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

(594-8)

This is natural and appropriate to Samson in his present condition, and the noble words are worthy of him. But this is not his fundamental reason for refusing Manoa's offer. Samson still feels that he must make expiation and that it is better to continue as he is than to become a 'burdenous drone' at the household hearth. In him the man of action

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rejects the prospect of safe retirement and idle old age. He wishes to endure to the full the punishment which God has given him and even to become a partner in inflicting it on himself; so conscious is he of his guilt and the need for expiation. Milton catches the superficial contradictions in Samson's nature, his assumption that all is nearly over with him and at the same time his stern desire to do the right thing as long as he can.

In the third scene, with Dalila, Samson finds himself face to face with the authoress of his ruin and the object of those desires which have so harmed him. That she still keeps her physical attractions is clear from the Chorus' comparison of her with a ship, and by their comments, after her departure, on the strange power of beauty. In dealing with her Samson faces his sternest ordeal. When she approaches, he is unsure of himself and says :

My Wife, my Traytress, let her not come near me.

(725)

But once Dalila begins to try her wiles, Samson knows that she cannot assert her old dominion over him. Her sophistries provoke his anger :

Out, out *Hyaena* ; these are thy wonted arts,
And arts of every woman false like thee.

(748-9)

He rejects her offer to look after him, and, though for a moment he feels that, if she touches his hand, she will awake fierce memories in him, he is neither deceived nor defeated by her. In this scene he shows not only that he has outlived his passions but that he has still a full share of his old fire and courage, or rather of a new fire and a new courage bred by his sufferings and the self-knowledge which they have taught him.

Finally, in the scene with Harapha Samson's reawakened and purified spirit begins to reach its full dimensions. Against this braggart giant Samson is prepared to pit his own unarmed strength, and so violent is his response to the booster's challenge that Harapha retires crestfallen. Against his abuse

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Samson defends his past life with spirit, knowing that his own worth is real and Harapha's a sham. But in his present mood he has a confidence which he has not had before. He feels assured that he will win in any battle against the Philistines because God is on his side. The strength, of which he was once so proud, he now recognises as God's gift to him :

I know no Spells, use no forbidden Arts ;
My trust is in the living God who gave me
At my Nativity this strength.

(1139-41)

More than this, Samson believes that, if he now fights, he will have God for his helper, since he fights for Him. Like a Crusader or a Covenanter, he flings his challenge to Harapha :

In confidence whereof I once again
Defie thee to the trial of mortal fight,
By combat to decide whose god is god,
Thine or whom I with *Israel's* Sons adore.

(1174-7)

He is prepared to do battle for his faith ; his cause is now not self, nor even in a narrow sense country, but religion. He has found a new kind of heroism and a new way to use his strength. And this process is both natural and noble. Samson has recovered from his defeated state and found an ideal to inspire and sustain him. The cause for which he is ready to fight is the highest that Milton can conceive.

The reversal in Samson's fortunes is thus displayed in a way which is both true to human nature and consistent with Milton's moral views. No doubt Aristotle would have approved of the manner in which the change is carried out, but Milton, who quotes Aristotle on his title-page, had to provide not merely a reversal of fortune but an *ἀναγνώρισις* or recognition. In his *Poetics* Aristotle regards recognition as indispensable to tragedy and thinks that the best results come when it is combined with reversal, as in *King Oedipus*, where the scene between Oedipus and the Messenger is the prelude to the catastrophe. Aristotle speaks on the whole of recognition of one person by another, like that of Orestes and his sister in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. But his

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chosen example is not like this, — not a case of the recognition of Oedipus by the Messenger or of the Messenger by Oedipus, but of Oedipus by himself, when he sees that he is not only the son of Laius but his murderer. This kind of self-recognition is very important to Sophocles. His tragic heroes, Heracles, Oedipus, and Philoctetes, reach the crisis of their lives for evil or good when they learn who and what they are, in what relation they stand to the gods, what destiny they must accept. A recognition may be tragically painful as in *King Oedipus*, or a source of strength and comfort as to Philoctetes, or to Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. It is this second kind that Milton introduces into *Samson*, and through it once again he shows how closer he is to Sophocles than to Aeschylus or Euripides.

Samson's self-recognition lies in the discovery that he, who is an outcast and a slave, is destined for some high end. He is slow to see it, but, as his spirits revive and his strength returns, he comes to realise that his life will not end in drudgery. He has his first prophetic inkling, when he tells Manoa that the Philistines will soon be defeated and their god humbled; and Manoa takes him at his word :

With cause this hope relieves thee, and these words
I as a Prophecy receive.

(472-3)

Samson does not yet know his own part in this coming triumph, and indeed the final moment comes not emphatically but clearly enough, not from some majestic revelation but from inner promptings. When, despite his first misgivings, Samson sets out for the festival, he obeys an inner voice, which tells him to go because something very important awaits him. As he himself says :

If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last.

(1387-9)

Both presentiments will of course be fulfilled, but that is not the most important knowledge. What most matters is that

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now Samson is neither the boastful hero nor the broken slave but the man who knows what he really is, the champion of a great cause, who, with God's help, will acquit himself nobly in it. In this confidence he speaks his last words on the stage :

Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our Law, my Nation, or my self,
The last of me or no I cannot warrant.

(1423-6)

If such is Milton's use of recognition, it fulfils Aristotle's requirements for the best kind, since it is closely connected with Samson's final reversal of fortune. As soon as he knows what he really is, he goes gladly to his end, and this is the fitting consummation of his life and the fulfilment of the destiny to which he was born.

So far Milton applies Aristotle's doctrine with a scholar's correctness and a poet's insight. There remains one more point of some relevance and difficulty. On his title-page Milton quotes in Greek and in Latin Aristotle's words that 'Tragedy is the imitation of a serious action . . . effecting through pity and fear the purgation of such emotions'. Now, though we cannot be certain what Aristotle means, and different interpretations have been given of his words, what matters here is what Milton thought them to mean, and this he expounds in the first sentences of his Preface :

Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by *Aristotle* to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sower against sour, salt to remove salt humours.

With his usual decisiveness Milton has made up his mind what Aristotle means : tragedy purifies us in general of pity and fear by making us take pleasure in seeing them well depicted. In other words, the pleasure given by tragedy is

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ultimately that of seeing a thing well done.¹ No one will deny that there is truth in this, but it is not the whole truth, and it is certainly not all that Milton does in *Samson*.

These words of the Preface recur irresistibly to us when we come to the last words of the play, spoken by the Chorus :

All is best, though we oft doubt,
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously ; whence *Gaza* mourns
And all that band them to resist
His uncontroulable intent,
His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion spent.

(1745-58)

When we respond to the poetry of these words, we see at once that Milton has provided a purgation different from what he describes in his Preface, or at least applied his doctrine in a special way. Not only have pity and fear been removed, but, as the Chorus says, all passion is spent, and we feel peace and consolation. In the end all is well, and all is clear. God's purpose is revealed, and Samson's death is not only noble but consoling. Milton, at least to his own satisfaction, has once again justified the ways of God to man and demonstrated that events which might seem to provoke misgiving are all for the best if we look at them in the right way.

Even those who do not share Milton's theology will agree that *Samson* creates a calm of mind. No doubt this is partly, due to the fact that it excites emotions less overwhelming than *King Oedipus* or *King Lear*, but it is also due to the way'

¹ In his Commonplace Book (Columbia ed., xviii, 206) Milton disputes Tertullian's objections to tragedy by an argument which owes very little to Aristotle: 'quid enim in tota philosophia aut gravius aut sanctius aut sublimius tragoedia recte constituta, quid utilius ad humanae vitae casus et conversiones uno intuitu spectandos ?'

in which Samson's last actions are presented. This is how a great hero should end his days, and there is both a moral and an artistic satisfaction in his final assertion of his powers and sacrifice of his life. It is morally right that good should triumph over evil, and aesthetically right that Samson's strength, which we cannot but admire, should be displayed for the last time on so stupendous a scale. In his choice of subject and his handling of it Milton leaves few questions unanswered. No doubt another theme would have caused him more difficulty, and made it harder to make all clear and satisfactory. But he knew the kind of field in which he could work best, and his choice of Samson for a subject shows how well he understood himself. In this play there are no serious departures from Greek models or from Aristotle's interpretation of them. There are differences, it is true, but more of degree than of kind. Milton's theology is more dogmatic and more assertive than that of Sophocles, but Sophocles too has a theology which plays an essential part in his plots. Milton, without abating any of his beliefs, has created a play which not only conforms to the Greek model but displays much of a Greek spirit. It succeeds because Milton shares the Greek belief that no subject is more important than the relations of God and man.

Yet though in *Samson* Milton transposes Greek tragedy to an English form which speaks for much that is most urgent in himself, we must surely feel that his play is not truly tragic in the modern sense. It does not really arouse pity and fear. Samson's fault is stressed so strongly that we hardly pity him, and if we feel any fear, it is less for him than for the Philistines. Nor does *Samson* awake that sense of catastrophe and waste which is the essence of tragic experience. Since all is for the best, there is nothing to regret or lament. Indeed we may suspect that Milton was temperamentally incapable of writing a truly tragic play. He liked to have everything explained and justified, and authentic tragedy neither explains nor justifies but creates a condition of mind in which grief transcends its own nature by its very extravagance. It appeals beyond the desire for rational order to an exalted acceptance of disorder and disaster. Of this Milton

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was perhaps incapable, and in that case he was wise to use his Greek models for the composition of a grave poem in which all discords are resolved and all sufferings accounted for.

In *Samson Agonistes* Milton did at last something which he had long wished to do : he created a real hero who was also a champion of God. In *Paradise Lost* he rejected the classical idea of heroism, but did not succeed in creating a new version of it on a human plane. Adam is no hero in this sense, and, though in different ways both the Son and Abdiel are heroic, they are not human. Milton indeed seems to have doubted whether authentically heroic qualities could be displayed by men in a way which met with his entire approval, and suggests that what he wants is not heroes but martyrs : he deplores long stories of knights and battles :

the better fortitude
Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom
Unsung.

(*P. L.* ix, 31-3)

But in Samson he found a hero who was also a martyr; whose purely heroic qualities are equal to the greatest, but who uses them not for his own honour but for the service of God. The creation of such a type answered a deep need in Milton. He was himself a great fighter, a redoubtable champion who liked to give resounding blows. Nor in this did he see anything to be ashamed of. He justified it by its use for causes which he had very much at heart, and in whose victory he placed his hopes for the salvation of England. In *Samson* he dramatises this spirit, and shows how much it means to him, how close it lies to his innermost and most passionate convictions.

VII

HÖLDERLIN'S HYMNS

IN the autumn of 1800 Friedrich Hölderlin revolutionised his metrical practice and began to compose a series of poems on a generous scale which may conveniently be called Hymns.¹ He had begun by writing regular, rhymed strophes in the manner of Schiller, but had found soon enough that they were too formal for what he wished to say. He then turned to unrhymed classical metres, — hexameters, elegiacs, Alcaics, and Asclepiads, — and made them a noble and expressive means for the passionate, personal poetry of his twenties. But before the end of the eighteenth century he evidently felt the need for some freer, more majestic, and essentially more Hellenic instrument. His first attempts to solve the problem may be seen in his use of free verse in the manner of Klopstock for *Hyperions Schicksaalslied* (*Hyperion's Song of Destiny*), which he wrote in 1799. But this did not content him, perhaps because it was not sufficiently orderly; and soon afterwards in his incomplete *Wie wenn am Feiertage* (*As on a holiday*) he attempted something much more elaborate. Despite its unfinished state, this poem seems to be an original attempt to follow the Greek system of metrical correspondence between separate strophes, but it differs from it by using three forms of strophe in succession and then repeating the same three forms on the principle *a b c* throughout the poem. For this Hölderlin had no exact Greek precedent, and that in itself may explain why he did not repeat the experiment, though the extreme strictness of the form may well also have deterred him. After these experiments he evolved a form which suited all his needs and which he

¹ I am greatly indebted throughout to the Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe of Hölderlin's works, edited by F. Beissner.

continued to use until the collapse of his powers in 1804. It is certainly based on Pindar, whom Hölderlin studied at this time and began to translate in the first half of 1800.

In general Hölderlin follows Pindar in constructing poems in which a large metrical unit is repeated regularly throughout. This unit may be either a simple strophe or a more complex triad. Just as Pindar himself prefers the second, so does Hölderlin; and his use of the first is confined to *Germanien* (*Germany*) and *Andenken* (*Remembrance*), just as Pindar confines it to some seven known poems. In this a single strophe is repeated through the poem, and there are no variations on it. In the triadic form, the repeated unit consists of strophe, antistrophe, and epode. Strophe and antistrophe match each other metrically in each triad and remain constant throughout, while the epode is different from them but matches all other epodes. Hölderlin preferred this form and worked on it in most of his hymns. But if Pindar provided Hölderlin with his main structure, this was altered in one important respect. The metrical correspondence between Pindar's units is exact to almost the last detail, but Hölderlin does not attempt this. His only exact correspondence is in the number of lines in each unit. This he preserves faithfully, but he does not trouble about the number of syllables in them. Nor has he anything to compare with Pindar's exact and varied metric. This after all is natural, since accentual German could never be made to do what quantitative Greek does, and Hölderlin was wise not to attempt it. Instead he relies on his ear to provide a rhythm which does indeed vary but maintains a more or less constant character through each poem. The result is a noble metrical structure which has much in common with that of Pindar's odes and can be turned to similar purposes.

Hölderlin began the composition of his hymns before the first assaults of the malady which was to ruin his life, and continued to work at them during the terrible years when he was struggling for his sanity. When he returned in July 1802 from Bordeaux to his mother's house in Niirtingen, he was out of his mind. On 22 June Susette Gontard, the Diotima of his great love, had died, but at the most this

appalling blow can only have aggravated an evil which was already there. For the next five years until the summer of 1807, when Hölderlin was sent as incurably insane to live in a carpenter's house at Tübingen, his madness increased, coming first in violent bouts, which were soon replaced by his usual gentleness and sanity, then for sustained periods. It is easy to think that at least the later hymns owe some of their strange intensity to his disordered state or that the personal struggles which they reveal hastened his madness. But for neither notion is there any real support. So far from being the products of a disordered mind, the hymns are formidable feats of will and intellect and imagination, impossible except for a man who was able, if only at intervals, to exert an iron control over himself. So far from being derived from his insanity, they show how heroically he exerted all his powers to defeat it. Nor is it likely that the interior struggles of which he writes enhanced his madness, since this was a form of schizophrenia purely physical in origin. In so far as it affected his poetry, it was that he fought with all his forces against the terrible menace and tried to master the sinister and frightening discords which he saw in himself.

How strongly Hölderlin was in control of himself when composing the hymns may be seen from his manuscripts of them. An idea would come to him and would fall into certain appropriate words which he would write down. Sometimes he realised that he could not do anything more with them, since, although they might contain an imaginative conception, they had not enough substance to make a poem, and then he would abandon them, as many other poets have. At other times the idea would so dominate and inspire him that he would produce a first draft which would seem sufficient to most poets. But here Hölderlin shows his urgent sense of mission and his powerful character. He would emend the text in several small respects, and then proceed to produce a second and even a third version, which kept what was best in the first, but removed inferior matter and replaced it by passages more central to his aim. He was able to do this even when his final madness was close to him,

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since his *Mnemosyne*', written in the autumn of 1803, survives in three versions, of which the last is both the most impressive and the best constructed. Though we have only one text of *Andenken*, which was written about the same time, it looks as if it were composed in the same way and represented the poet's final thoughts in a form which satisfied him. There were indeed still other times when he found it more difficult to achieve finality. There are three versions of *Der Einzige* (*The Only One*) and four of *Patmos*, and not one of these is really complete. In these two poems Hölderlin was grappling with issues which troubled him deeply but about which he had not quite made up his mind; and that no doubt is why he was unable to bring them to a conclusion. But this very failure is a tribute to his intellectual integrity and self-command. He saw that he had not found his solution, and went on to the last trying to do so.

The hymns have in recent times been called 'die vaterländischen Gesänge', 'the songs of the fatherland', and the name is justified by a letter which Hölderlin wrote in December 1803 to his friend Wilmans and in which he speaks of 'the high and pure jubilation of songs of the fatherland', whose 'content should be immediately concerned with the fatherland or the time'. That in these poems Germany is much in his mind we cannot doubt, but the poems pass so far beyond local or even national themes and deal with matters of so vast a relevance that it seems unfair to tie them down too closely or too exclusively to Germany. It was, apart from France which he visited for a few months, the only country known to Hölderlin, and he naturally gave grave attention to its failures and its needs, as he had earlier in *Hyperion*, but though his home provided him with a starting-place for his voyages into the unknown, and though he never forgot it, he was not hampered by merely local allegiances and was in the truest sense a pilgrim of humanity. What perhaps moved him to describe his poems in this way was a sense not so much of its limitations as of the freedom which his new form of verse promised and of the opportunities which it gave him to deal authoritatively with the crisis of his age. He, who had hitherto spoken for himself

in the narrow bounds of classical metres, was now able to speak with a more powerful voice not merely for himself but for his fellow-men. Wonderful though some of his classical poems are, they are more obviously personal than his hymns, and for this reason less majestic. In abandoning the strict forms of classical verse for others of wider stretch and scope, Hölderlin was able to speak on matters of universal interest with a new detachment and a new authority. In these last flights his genius, freed from its old restrictions but rejoicing in a discipline of its own making, found a whole new world to conquer and essayed the task with unflinching courage.

Pindar's influence on these hymns is not confined to their form. Indeed Hölderlin assimilates and transforms to his own purposes something of Pindar's outlook. Pindar, whose songs were performed at feasts of the gods or the festivals of men, speaks often about himself, but in so doing he speaks also for all who are present. He assumes that they agree with him on fundamental matters and that he gives utterance to what is in all their minds, that he is at once the prophet of the Muses and the interpreter of his people. In his hymns Hölderlin certainly does something of the same kind. He speaks sometimes in the first person singular, sometimes in the first plural, but with both he suggests that he and the German people are faced by the same crisis and need the same solution to it. If he assumes some authority, it is because he sees the situation more clearly than others do and is able to explain it to them more readily than they are themselves. He feels behind him a great, unconscious force which comes from his identification of himself with them and sustains him in the obstacles and obscurities of his mission. Great as much of his earlier poetry is, it lacks this special sense of being at one with his people and serving its cause because it is also Hölderlin's own.

The fundamental theme of the hymns is the spiritual frustration of Germany and its need to regain a sense of divine powers at work in itself. For Hölderlin these powers were closely connected with the Greek gods of whom he had learned as a boy and in whom he found something so close to his own experience that he not only believed them to be

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real but made them the centre of his moral and artistic life. He had felt their presences close to him in the voices of the rivers and the woods, in the mystery of love and in the mystery of death, above all perhaps in his own moments of creation when inspiring forces filled his being and he knew an unearthly delight on the wings of song. What it meant to him can be seen from the lines *Da ich ein Knabe war* (*When I was a boy*), in which he tells how a god saved him from the shouts of men, how he played with the flowers and the breezes and was loved by the sun and the moon. But he goes on to say something which provides a clue to his later life :

Doch kannt' ich euch besser,
Als ich je den Menschen gekannt,
Ich verstand die Stille des Aethers,
Der Menschen Worte verstand ich nie.

(Yet I knew you better
Than ever I knew men;
I understood the Aether's silence,
The words of men I understood not.)

Experience was to test Holderlin's association with the gods and to put a heavy strain on it. He could not continue to live isolated from men among celestial presences, and as the pressure and problems of living forced themselves on him, he modified his faith and tried to adapt it to his changed conditions. But the Greek gods still represented all that he thought most wonderful and most holy. He still felt them in the landscape and in himself, but he saw them less clearly and was less certain what they meant.

None the less he felt that he must still seek this divine communion and make the most of it by understanding all that it implied. Of course he felt that in comparison with these tremendous, unearthly powers he himself was a poor, failing, and ailing thing, but that did not deter him from clinging to his celestial hopes. He wished to bring this experience to other men, to redeem the world by it. So lofty a theme called for treatment in the Greek manner, and of all Greek poets Pindar was the nearest to Holderlin in this

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quest, just because Pindar sees the gods at work everywhere, in the world of nature and the world of men. At the festivals where his songs were sung he believed that gods were present in honour of those who, by their heroic achievements, had come as near as men can to the exalted bliss of Olympus. One of his aims was to stress this affinity, to show that despite all the differences between earth and heaven there are moments which transfigure the human condition and transcend the sense of mortality. So Hölderlin, as Pindar's disciple, felt an urgent desire to restore to men the lost vision of the gods and with it to heal their insecurity and their distress. What this could mean he knew from his own experience, and the hymns are the instrument through which he presents his message and his summons.

Hölderlin was not content that this vision should be confined to a world apart. In all his work he tries to show how there is a real unity of things, that the most obstinate discord can be resolved into a harmony. Though he knew that the world of gods is indeed different from that of men, he believed that the second draws all that is best in it from the first, and that the glory of visible things is not a reflection of the divine glory but a very part of it. Just as in his own life he matched his visionary transports with a strong, sensuous love of natural things, so in his poetry his sense of immanent gods sharpens his observation and his awareness of what lies before his eyes. If on the one hand he is able to present transcendental, if not mystical, subjects with all the colour and shape of familiar things, so on the other hand he makes even the most familiar things shine with an unearthly radiance. Indeed for Hölderlin himself such a distinction hardly existed ; so convinced was he that the gods move in the familiar scene, which is at once their dwelling-place and their living word.

A poetry with such a message demanded a special technique. It was not enough to use the worn conventions of classicism and to present the ancient gods in guises which had become stale through familiarity. The whole question must be felt and thought out again from the beginning through the actual experience which was Hölderlin's own, and his conclusions must be presented with all the truth of

which he was capable. His first instrument in this most difficult task was a special kind of symbol. Since he was concerned with a single, present world, and not with any transcendental order above the phenomenal, his symbols do not stand for supernatural, intangible realities, but present concrete examples of the divine forces which he sees vividly at work. If it is right to call him a symbolist at all, it is because these examples, chosen with hard thought and a full sense of apt significance, express in a very arresting and concentrated way some central point in his theme. In this he does not resemble a true symbolist like Blake, but again recalls Pindar, who often presents the essential point of a poem in some scene or story and leaves his audience to see how relevant it is. For instance, when he begins *Pythian* I with a description of the power of music in heaven, he suggests the inner nature of the festal occasion which he celebrates. This is what Hölderlin also does, even if he modifies the method to suit his slightly different purpose.

The advantage of this technique is that it catches the imagination by some bold pictorial passage and forces us to ask what it means. So in *Der Rhein* (*The Rhine*) Hölderlin begins by telling how he sits at the edge of the forest, alone with his thoughts, when he hears an impressive, mysterious sound :

Jetzt aber, drinn im Gebirg,
Tief unter den silbernen Gipfeln
Und unter fröhlichem Grün,
Wo die Wälder schauernd zu ihm,
Und der Felsen Häupter übereinander
Hinabschaun, taglang, dort
Im kältesten Abgrund hört'
Ich um Erlösung jammern
Den Jüngling, es hörten ihn, wie er tobt',
Und die Mutter Erd' anklagt',
Und den Donnerer, der ihn gezeuget,
Erbarmend die Eltern, doch
Die Sterblichen flohn von dem Ort,
Denn furchtbar war, da lichtlos er
In den Fesseln sich walzte,
Das Rasen des Halbgotts.

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(But now, among mountains,
Deep below the silvery peaks,
And below delighted green,
Where shuddering the woods
And the crests of rocks over each other
Look down at him, day after day, there
In the coldest abyss, I heard
The young man lamenting
For deliverance, to be listened to,
As he raged and accused Mother Earth
And the Thunderer, who begat him,
His parents pitied him, and yet
Mortals fled from the place;
For terrible, as without light
He writhed in his fetters,
Was the demi-god's raving.)

This might well be taken to be no more than a description of the Rhine as a romantic poet sees it. But it serves a graver purpose. The Rhine is an image of the German people and its destiny. Its imprisoned strength, its lamentations over its lot, its longing for liberty, its divine lineage, its severance from the world of other men, all these, which seem so natural to the Rhine, are part of the German doom. At the same time the passage is also to be taken at its face value. Hölderlin really believed that the Rhine was the offspring of the gods and had the kind of life which he attributed to it. In his vision of a single universe the image both lives for itself and stands for many other things, and there is no final division between the two functions.

Hölderlin's method is not always so straightforward as this, because, as he saw more clearly the vast implications of his quest, he could not always begin so easily with a familiar scene and had instead to construct something which would serve as a starting-point in no less vivid and significant a manner. This is what he does at the beginning of *Patmos*:

Nah ist
Und schwer zu fassen der Gott.
Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.

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Im Finstern wohnen
Die Adler und furchtlos gehn
Die Söhne der Alpen über den Abgrund weg
Auf leichtgebaute Brücken.
Drum, da gehäuft sind rings
Die Gipfel der Zeit, und die Liebsten
Nah wohnen, ermattend auf
Getrenntesten Bergen,
So gieb unschuldig Wasser,
O Fittige gieb uns, treuesten Sinns
Hinüberzugehn und wiederzukehren.

.
(Near is
The God, and hard to clasp.
But where danger is, grows
The rescuing power also.
In darkness dwell
The eagles, and fearlessly
The sons of the Alps go over the abyss
On lightly built bridges.
Therefore, since around are heaped
The peaks of Time, and the most beloved
Dwell close, growing weary
On most separate mountains,
Then give innocent water,
O give us wings, most faithfully
To cross over and return.)

The scene, constructed with great firmness and precision, is almost a picture of life on the Alps, but it is clearly much more. The opening words suggest that we should look for something else, and we soon pick up the hints given in such images as 'the summits of time' and 'most separate mountains'. The whole majestic picture is a symbol of men living apart from one another in their own sublime fastnesses, and conveys in a vivid, impressive form the spiritual state of the age. Hölderlin recognises that there are indeed a few noble spirits who are close to the gods, but they are cut off from one another, and only the most courageous are able to cross the severing gulfs. For the rest what is needed is a new innocence and devotion to enable them to surmount the divisions which time has set between them.

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After arranging his scene in this way, Hölderlin develops his poetical argument, and just because the argument is poetical, a chapter of experience pursued with passionate and imaginative thought, it does not move by a straight road of discussion or necessarily come to a decisive conclusion. The poetry is in the struggle, in the effort to grasp the vast issues at stake, and to see what they mean. In such a method, what we might think to be necessary steps are often omitted, and what really counts is the intensity of intellectual grasp and vision at each stage. Yet these poems are far from being built on any scheme so easy as mere psychological progression. Each has its central theme, which may indeed be looked at and debated from more than one side, but which none the less persists and gives a unity to the poem. In the earlier hymns this unity is easy to recognise, as in *Germanien*, where the subject is the hope that Germany will recover her strength and confidence by learning to love her natural setting and by understanding all that it has to teach about the presence of gods. But in the later poems, where the issues grow darker, as Hölderlin probes ever deeper into himself and his unresolved mysteries, we might feel that he loosens or loses his grip on his subject and is too ready to follow the promptings of his inspiration in the hope of finding something at the end. But this is far from being the case. In the latest hymns the sequence is indeed not easy to unravel, but that is only because his concentration is even greater on the purely poetical aspects of his subjects. When, with his failing powers, Hölderlin might easily have slackened his hold, he exerted himself all the more to see that every word did its full task.

This may be seen in *Andenken*, written in the spring of 1803. The first two stanzas look entirely descriptive, as they tell how the north-east wind reminds Hölderlin of Bordeaux, of its rivers and gardens, its trees over a mill, and women walking on festal days in spring. It might be no more than an affectionate memory of something whose simple beauty touched Hölderlin when he was in France, but though it is this, it is also a concrete example and image of a spiritual state, of the happy calm which comes to men and women

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who are in affectionate touch with nature and with one another. The next three stanzas show how much more he has on his mind and what part this initial scene plays in a larger scheme. It presents one side of a complex situation ; the other side is presented in the Garonne which flows to the sea and in the wind which promises good voyages to sailors. The peaceful, happy life on land is balanced by the vast spaces of the sea, which is itself an image of uncharted experience, with all its opportunities for discovery and enrichment. It inspires the love of adventure, which is man's most valuable possession because it is the spring of his creative actions. Those who live on land see the great rivers flowing to the sea; and, as Hölderlin thinks of them, he knows that he has still to face the call of the unknown and to master it in his art:

Es nehmet aber
Und giebt Gedächtniss die See,
Und die Lieb' auch heftet fleissig die Augen,
Was bleibet aber, stoffen die Dichter.

.
(But it is the sea
That takes and gives remembrance,
And love also fixes diligent eyes.
But what is lasting, the poets provide.)

The conclusion brings all the strands of the poem together. The sea and love, which have been touched upon in the opening scene, are now both seen to play their part in the creative activity which is man's highest task.

This impressive technique was used by Hölderlin to present a poetry of his most intimate and disturbing problems. In it he faced what was in fact a religious crisis. His earlier poetry shows how he saw the gods at work, but the hymns do not repeat what he has said before. They take up the quest at a new point, when something has challenged Hölderlin's faith and forced him to look more searchingly into its foundations. He felt not only that he had lost some of his most cherished consolations but that something too had gone out of himself. He speaks of this loss in sad and

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exalted words, and its nature is clear enough. He, who in his earlier days had known absorbing visions and the confidence of exalted ecstasy, who still saw in the world around him the divine revelations of nature, who still clung to the myths which had revealed and interpreted so much to him, had been struck in his inner life by poverty and neglect, by the death of Diotima, by his own terrible malady. These forces had conspired to break into his fastness and drove him to assess his beliefs anew. Behind the splendour and the courage of the hymns lies a sense of melancholy, almost of defeat, which Hölderlin sums up in images drawn from Greek poetry :

Am Feigenbaum ist mem
Achilles mir gestorben,
Und Ajax liegt
An den Grotten, nahe der See,
An Bächen, benachbart dem Skamandros.
(Mnemosyne)

(At the fig-tree is my
Achilles fallen,
And Ajax lies
In the grottoes by the sea,
By streams, with Scamander for neighbour.)

He felt that the bright figures who had sustained him were fading from his vision and that his beloved Hellenic world was receding into some remote sphere beyond his grasp.

Against this depression Hölderlin mustered his remaining assurances and began to build his scheme of life anew. He still felt the old enchantment, still knew that the Greeks possessed something unique which meant almost everything to him and would work miracles if only it could be conveyed to others. He phrased his hopes in a wonderful, evocative image, in which the ancient belief in the Islands of the Blest stands for the mystery of his elusive and yet attainable vision :

und in den Ocean schiffend
Die duftenden Inseln fragen
Wohin sie sind.

(Die Titaneri)

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(and sailing in the Ocean
The fragrant islands question
Whither they are.)

Buoyed by this hope, Hölderlin still applied the powers of his visual imagination to evoking scenes of the Hellenic world and turned the extensive resources of his learning to reproduce the Greek landscape in all its light and colour. He imagines himself under the trees of Ionia, where the cranes fly among the mountains, or thinks of the spring of Parnassus and the golden brooks of Tmolus. This is not a drug or an escape ; it is an effort to see his own country with eyes purified and refreshed by the vision of Greece, to relate his domestic scenes to those of his imagination and so to understand them better. In the spring, when he looks around at his own countryside, he thinks of Ionia :

O Land des Homer!
Am purpurnen Kirschbaum oder wenn
Von dir gesandt im Weinberg mir
Die jungen Pfirsiche grünen,
Und die Schwalbe fernher kommt und vieles erzählend
An meinen Wänden ihr Haus baut, in
Den Tagen des Mais, auch unter den Sternen
Gedenk' ich, o Ionia, dein!

(Die Wanderung)

(O land of Homer!
By the purple cherry-tree, or when,
Sent by you, in the vineyard I see
The young peaches turn green,
And the swallow comes from afar, and with many a tale
Builds its house on my walls,
In the days of May, also under the stars,
I think, Ionia, of you!)

He feels that, if he can only bring this sight of Greece to his own land, his ideals will be translated into reality and give confidence and happiness to his people.

The spirit in which Hölderlin set about this task can be seen most clearly in *Germanien*. He begins by addressing the ancient gods and says that he dare not call upon them, because they have forsaken his country and are too terrible

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for him to invoke. But if he shrinks from them, he knows too that their successors have had their day and cannot help him. This is not a denial of his Hellenic gods but a confession that he and his country are too feeble to face them in their fearful reality. None the less he does his best and comes as near as he dares to these strong divinities by invoking not indeed their essential and holiest powers, which he had once known himself, but their living presence in the world. So he advances to his message, when he makes a young figure address Germany and tell her what she must do. She must return to nature and grow strong on the mysteries around her :

O trinke Morgenliifte,
Biss dass du offen bist,
Und nenne, was vor Augen dir ist,
Nicht länger darf Geheimniss mehr
Das Ungesprochene bleiben,
Nachdem es lange verhüllt ist.

(O drink the morning breezes
Until you are open,
And name what lies before your eyes,
No longer can the unspoken
Now remain a secret,
After it has been veiled for long.)

If Germany will only become conscious of her encompassing wonders and try to understand them, she will feel the supporting strength of the earth, her mother, and of the dead whose voices echo from the past. Hölderlin was sufficiently a disciple of Rousseau to believe in a return to nature, but it was of a very special kind. For him it was more than an aboriginal freedom or the removal of artificial restrictions ; it was a communion with natural powers and an ability to receive their inspiration and turn it into action.

For his sick country Hölderlin desired a new access of strength and confidence, and for this he could not but turn to his Greek gods, in whom he saw the personification of celestial strength in its highest form. There were indeed times when he wondered why he felt this attraction and allegiance to the Olympians, as if it were not entirely right

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or natural for him to do so. So in the first version of *Der Einzige* he opens with a statement of his feelings :

Was ist es, das
An die alten seeligen Küsten
Mich fesselt, dass ich mehr noch
Sie Hebe, als mein Vaterland ?
Denn wie in himmlische
Gefangenschaft verkauft
Dort bin ich, wo Apollo gieng
In Königsgestalt,
Und zu unschuldigen Jünglingen sich
Herablies Zevs und Söhn' in heiliger Art
Und Töchter zeugte
Der Hohe unter den Menschen ?

(What is it that
To the ancient holy shores
Fetters me, that I love them
Still more than my fatherland ?
For, as if into heavenly
Bondage sold,
I am there, where Apollo went
In the shape of a king,
And to innocent young men
Zeus came down and in holy fashion
Begot sons and daughters,
The High One among mankind ?)

It was this element of divine strength which appealed to Hölderlin. Just as he ends *Germanien* by a prophecy that his country will be a priestess and dispense counsel to kings and peoples, or in *Der Rhein* says that if the gods need anything, it is heroes, so in *Versöhnender der du nimmergeglaubt* (*Conciliator, who never believed*) he makes it clear that the first gift of the gods is power :

Des Göttlichen aber empfiengen wir
Doch viel. Es ward die Flamm uns
In die Hände gegeben, und Boden und Meersfluth.
(But from the divine we received
Much nevertheless. The flame was given
Into our hands, and the soil, and the sea floods.)

It was the sense of hampered and restricted power in his

country that haunted and depressed him, and even if he felt no need to explain in detail what this power was, it is clear that it was something akin to the inspiration, the sense of closeness to the gods and the springs of life, which he had known himself in youth.

On the other hand power was not Hölderlin's only concern. He was far indeed from sharing his countrymen's delusion that power is the only thing that matters or from thinking of it in terms of domination and imperial might. Himself the gentlest and most generous of men, he assumed that it was right for men to live in tranquillity and affection with one another. In the hymns he gives examples of his love for harmonious societies and settings, whether it is the Greeks, whose poets sit among the wrestlers at the Games, or his own country, when the workshop is silent on a holiday morning, or the first meeting between the *primaeval* Germans and the strangers of the Black Sea, or the Rhine, which nourishes children in the cities which it has founded. This love of humankind and its ageless, innocent activities was as deep in Hölderlin as his desire for divine power, and he felt it to be no less divine. It too had its protecting presences and made its own demands. If this spirit is to be seen in its purest and most touching form in the poems to Diotima, it is none the less present in *Der Rhein*, which Hölderlin dedicated to his friend Isaak Sinclair, and is implicit in nearly all the hymns. Indeed Hölderlin desired to revive his country because he loved its people, and believed that such a revival could only increase peace and affection.

In itself this dual purpose might not seem very disturbing. It is perfectly possible to combine a love for all that is gentlest in men with a belief in the inspiring, emboldening power of the spirit. But in Hölderlin a dark and menacing conflict arose. As he meditated on the nature of the gods and found in them sources of life :

Die ewigen Götter sind
Voll Lebens allzeit,

(*Der Rhein*)

(The eternal gods are
At all times full of life,)

he could not but concentrate on this aspect of them and develop his ideas on it until he formed a religious or philosophical system in which divine power matters more than anything else. As he did this, he saw prospects of renewed vitality and enhanced perceptions, the spirit of song turned into fact and the high dramas of the past played again on a modern stage. This was perhaps the driving force of his inspiration, the spirit which kept him to work with so strong a will, when every effort exacted a heavy toll and demanded an almost intolerable command of himself. He was able to write because he believed with apostolic sincerity in the importance of his mission. But the other side of his nature worked against this. As he became more conscious of the need for love and affection and saw more clearly what they really meant, he began to suspect that they did not belong to the world of his Olympian gods and resisted assimilation to it. He saw too that they came from the Christian faith which he had rejected in his passionate first love of Greece, until now he wondered if his rejection was right.

The conflict took place at a deep level in Hölderlin's consciousness. It was aggravated by his relations with his mother, who had brought him up in a gloomy and guilt-ridden faith and set all her ambitions on his becoming a pastor. In resisting her plans with stubborn silence he had in his first magnificent years felt no qualms and would indeed have thought any surrender to her a gross betrayal of what he believed to be holy. But when his health began to give way and he lost much of his self-confidence, he felt impelled to look again at Christianity and ask what it meant. He had strong reasons for doing so. His Hellenic vision had not sufficed to protect him from heart-breaking disasters ; his own gentle nature called for something more human than Olympian beauty and strength ; memories from his upbringing assailed him and undermined his state of innocence. The result was that when he wrote hymns on the needs of his country and hoped to show how it might be redeemed by an unreckonable rebirth of the spirit, he found himself harassed by thoughts of another creed and another redemption. If he had revised his first concept of the gods, he still clung to

them, but now he found that he could not think of them without Christ coming into his mind and troubling his assumptions.

The conflict which this started in Hölderlin can be seen above all in *Der Einzige* and *Patmos*, and what it cost him in strain and struggle is clear from the pains which he took with both poems and from his inability to bring either to a satisfactory conclusion. He had already begun to face the issue in 1800 when he wrote his elegiac *Brod und Wein* (*Bread and Wine*) and had found what seemed a satisfactory solution by speaking of the 'son of the Highest, the Syrian', who comes down to the shadows of earth and gives light alike to sages and imprisoned souls. He had there assumed that Christ is a second, late-born Dionysus, a quickening power who works miracles through bread and wine. This solved the problem for the moment, and there is no hint that Hölderlin was dissatisfied with it. But in *Der Einzige* he has searched himself more ruthlessly and is deeply troubled. He asks again what place Christ can have in his scheme of things, and feels that he must have a place, that he too belongs to the company of the gods, even if they jealously exclude him from it:

Mein Meister und Herr!
 O du, mein Lehrer!
 Was bist du feme
 Geblieben ? und da
 Ich fragte unter den Alten,
 Die Helden und
 Die Götter, warum bliebest
 Du aus ? Und jetzt ist voll
 Von Trauern meine Seele
 Als eifertet, ihr Himmlischen, selbst
 Dass, dien' ich einem, mir
 Das andere fehlet.

(My Master and Lord!
 O you my teacher!
 Why have you stayed
 Afar ? and when
 Among the ancients I asked
 The heroes and gods, why did you

HÖLDERLIN'S HYMNS

Stay outside ? and now my soul
Is full of sorrow,
As though you Heavenly Ones yourselves
Cried out that, if I serve one,
The other is lacking.)

This is Hölderlin's crisis. He feels, that, though he adores both Christ and the ancient gods; they exclude one another and that he cannot worship both. So far all three versions of the poem agree, but after this they begin to vary and show how Hölderlin faltered before any firm conclusion. He first tries to make Christ a source of power and inspiration, like Heracles and Dionysus, and makes him differ from them only in his earthly career, in which he is compared to a captive eagle. In the later versions the kinship with the ancients gods is developed in a new direction and Christ becomes a principle of order against the champions of Chaos, who are symbolised by the Titans. Even more than this, he is like a sun which gives light and warmth to an age ravaged by storms. But the solutions remain tentative, and it is clear that Hölderlin was not satisfied by them.

In *Patmos* the whole attempt to equate Christ with Heracles and Dionysus is abandoned, and a new start is made from a more advanced position. In all the versions Christ appears as a god, the son of the Highest, and the new spirit at work is revealed through the symbolism of the poet's spiritual journey from the famous places of Greece, which stand for his Hellenic devotion, to Patmos, the poor but hospitable island where beggars and castaways, the broken and the lost, are welcomed and cared for. From this Hölderlin develops, not without hesitations and misgivings, his last attempt to place Christ in the hierarchy of divine beings. In all the versions he is moving towards a nobler conception of Christianity and the principles of light and order which it embodies. He regrets that it has for so long been neglected or forgotten, but asserts that Christ still lives. More importantly, he seems to be feeling his way to a position in which the heroic side of Christianity is of less account than the human, and what matters most is the self-sacrifice which is prompted by love. Yet here what counts

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most is not the tentative conclusion but the spirit in which it is sought, and Hölderlin shows how deeply the whole matter concerns him :

Zu lang, zu lang schon ist
Die Ehre der Himmlischen unsichtbar.
Denn fast die Finger müssen sie
Uns führen und schmähhlich
Entreisst das Herz uns eine Gewalt.

(Too long now, too long
Is the honour of the Heavenly Ones invisible.
For they must almost guide
Our fingers, and shamefully
A power is tearing away our hearts.)

Hölderlin's health broke irrecoverably before he could settle these questions for himself, but the power of his last hymns owes much to his agony of indecision and uncertainty. He faced something very deep in himself, a conflict between cherished convictions which meant almost everything to him and quite different lessons forced upon him by experience, and he found it hard to choose between them or to bring them together in a single scheme. But from this very indecision come the varied notes of majestic confidence and anxious brooding, of impersonal detachment and tender humanity, of flashing insight and obstructing gloom, which are woven together in the hymns and enrich them with a most remarkable poetry.

If Hölderlin did not succeed in finding for his country a poetry which should give it new life, he did at least succeed in showing how grave its problems were and what vast issues were involved. If as a young man of the Romantic generation he had his own vision of a *fenseits* or Beyond, he tried harder than almost anyone else to translate this into a present reality. In comparison with him we feel that Shelley's Platonic abstractions are too bloodless and too remote, that Wordsworth's approach to nature is too narrow, that even Keats is too absorbed in the visible scene to be aware of gods at work in and behind it. Hölderlin equals his master, Pindar, in his sense of a single world, in which the gods give meaning

to everything that is or happens, and in his belief that without them man is lost in despair at his own insignificance. So though he differs greatly from Pindar in his longing for the rebirth of a lost world, his shyness about giving too clear an outline to his Heavenly Ones, his candid presentation of his own inner struggles, his discordant element of Christian faith, yet he resembles Pindar in his belief that there are forces in the living world which transform human life if they can only be known and honoured, and that the power of song is the first and finest means of doing this. This essential similarity justifies others which may be partly ascribed to imitation. The abrupt shifts of thought, the occasional personal revelations, the interrupting, heavily charged maxims, the sudden, unexpected closes, the plastic or pictorial images which carry so much more than appears at first sight, the sublime detachment and the controlled passion, all these Hölderlin may well have learned from Pindar, but he mastered them because he needed them for his task and because they answered an urgent demand in himself that he should put into poetry the whole of his exalted and troubled consciousness. Most Pindaric poets are far removed in spirit from their master, and for this reason even the most faithful imitation of his manner seems hollow and unreal, but Hölderlin was indeed close to him, not merely because the Olympian gods formed the centre of his universe, but because he saw that man transcends mortality only when a god-given glory comes to him and makes life sweet and noble.

When in the Second Part of *Faust* Goethe presents the figure of Euphorion, the child of Faust and Helen, he makes him a symbol of the union of North and South, of German and Greek, of Romantic and Classical, who in the fiery ardour of youth aspires too high on the wings of genius and destroys himself. In creating him Goethe had Byron in mind, but the best counterpart to Euphorion is not Byron but Hölderlin, whom Goethe once met but thought little of, and certainly did not have in mind when he imagined his new child of destiny in Euphorion. Yet Hölderlin embodies, as no other European poet does, the union of Northern dream and Hellenic vision. Rooted as he was in his own

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land, he knew from his youth onwards what the Greek gods were, and nursed his inspiration on them. If a romantic longing drove him to them at first, he informed it with a classical strength and radiance. Though he never saw the sunlit lands of the Aegean, he knew by some inner insight their celestial brilliance and their power to shape the destinies of men. Into his chosen task of making his vision real to his own countrymen he threw everything that he had and sacrificed not only his comfort and his health but in the end his peace of mind and his first assurances. For a few golden years he knew the raptures of unimpeded creation ; then by a prodigious exertion of will he faced with the full resources of elaborate song the mysteries which troubled and frustrated him. He was still straining heroically in flight when the gods, whom he had loved and honoured, forsook him, and he fell headlong to earth, mortally stricken.

VIII

PUSHKIN

THERE are two kinds of great poet. The one has so dominating a personality that everything which he touches becomes his own, shows at every point his unmistakable impress, and has indeed been transmuted through his vision. Whatever he learns from other men he adapts to his own system of beliefs, and he retains only what suits his selective and sometimes intolerant taste. What he says proceeds from a character which is so sure of itself that it makes no compromise with common opinions. The result is a poetry which reveals its author at every stage and appeals almost as much through his personal idiosyncrasies as through his poetical genius. Such are Dante and Milton. But there is another kind of poet who works in almost an opposite way. His genius is brought into action not from a hard core of personal convictions but by a profound, subtle, and imaginative understanding of other men. His poetry derives its strength much less from a system into which everything fits than from an ability to see other men from inside, to share their outlooks, and from this to create a poetical world in which his own personality is so elusive that we hardly know what it is. Such are Shakespeare and Homer. Of course they have their own tastes and beliefs, but they do not assert or press them. They are content to create a poetry of humanity, of human fortunes and the human scene ; and their creation stands on its own and has its own life almost irrespective of its makers. If in the first class the guiding discipline comes from a single, dominating outlook, in the second class it comes from a love of life in its variety and richness. Indeed, we might go further and say that while the first kind of poet is the centre of his universe, the second makes the universe the centre of his poetry.

If we wish to allot Pushkin to one or other of these classes, there is no doubt that it must be to the second. His genius is ultimately of the Shakespearian kind. This is not to say that he is so great a poet as Shakespeare. But he is Shakespearian in the sense that his genius worked not from any organised system of convictions but from an imaginative understanding of human beings. Of course he knew Shakespeare and imitated him up to a point in *Boris Godunov*, but he would not have imitated him so successfully if he had not had some real affinity with him. Pushkin enjoyed the living scene in the same way as Shakespeare, and had a similar gift of seeing the implicit poetry of human situations and actions and characters. It is this which enabled him to write with so fine and so easy an understanding of Gipsies and Caucasians, of old women like his nurse, of young women like Tatyana, of ruthless potentates like Peter the Great, of poor broken creatures like Evgeny in *The Bronze Horseman*, of ambitious adventurers like the False Dmitri and Marina of Poland, of rakes like Graf Nulin, and traitors like Mazepa. In a wide range of human types Pushkin discovered an essential poetry and displayed it not with any personal bias but somehow for its own sake, in its own right, with its own claims. His range of creation is much narrower than Shakespeare's, his details less rich, his imaginative reach less adventurous, but ultimately he belongs to the same class because what counts with him and sets his creative faculties to work is the poetical appeal of human beings.

A creative gift of this kind demands for its full realisation a poetry in which abstract ideas are kept in a subordinate place and introduced not for their intrinsic worth, but for the light which they throw on the characters who hold them or act in accordance with them. Whereas both Dante and Milton deal richly in ideas for their own sake, Shakespeare is interested in them because they are part of the infinite variety of human nature. His own ideas are to be found, if anywhere, not in explicit statements, but in the way in which he so constructs a plot as to elicit emotional responses from us and to guide us to conclusions more imaginative than intellectual. The same is true, up to a point, of Pushkin. In his longer

poems, whether narratives or dramas, he shows how well he understands the poetry of ideas when they are expressed in emotion or action. His characters say what they think, but there is no assurance that Pushkin would agree with them. It is they who count. He asks that we should see them as they are, and respond to them. It is not for nothing that he was the father of the Russian novel, not merely in short stories like *The Queen of Spades*, but in his long poem *Evgeny Onegin*, or that his Lisa and Tatyana are the first examples of the Russian girl who makes so enchanting reappearances in Turgenev and Tolstoy. Pushkin had in him much of the novelist, in the sense that his creations live as human beings in their own strength and make us like them for their own sakes.

But though Pushkin had these Shakespearian gifts, he did not realise them on a Shakespearian scale or always in a Shakespearian way. For this an inferiority of genius is partly responsible, but this was accentuated by his time and circumstances, which were not favourable to his peculiar endowment. Shakespeare drew greatly, no doubt without realising it, on the new ideas which had come from Italy about the importance and the possibilities of man. His natural taste for human beings was strengthened and helped by the conception that man has unlimited potentialities and is a fascinating subject for his own sake, irrespective of theological or even of political doctrines. Pushkin found no such encouragement in his time. Though in youth he absorbed the liberal ideas which had filtered through to Russia from the French Revolution, the failure of the Decembrists, when he was twenty-six years old, taught him not to expect too much of politics, and his remaining years were spent in the knowledge that he and his fellow-countrymen were doomed to live in an age of increasing despotism. It may well be doubted whether in these years Russia was a land to encourage a poetry which needed for its widest fulfilment a confident belief in the worth of every man. It had certainly nothing of the Elizabethan spaciousness, the sense of vast worlds to be conquered both on the map and in the mind, the trust that no goal was impossible for anyone

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who had the courage to seek it. The regime of Nicholas I demanded a narrow and exacting conformity. Pushkin resisted it as best he could, but it hampered the free movement of his genius and deprived him of the encouragement which a temperament of his kind needs for its happy development.

Moreover, Pushkin's circumstances were 'completely unlike Shakespeare's. Shakespeare belonged to the new middle class and enjoyed all its splendid opportunities for social intercourse both in London and the country. Pushkin, like Shelley and Byron and Leopardi, was an aristocrat, and, more significantly, an impoverished aristocrat. He was distrusted and disliked by the rich nobles who gathered at the court and had the ear of the Emperor. Pushkin might despise them for their dubious lineage, but he was powerless against them. He lived in their world, but as an inferior, and in his last years almost as a lackey. The restrictions which the Tsar imposed on his movements gave him few chances to study a wide range of human types and ways of life. What chances he had, he took. He studied Gipsies in Bessarabia and primitive mountaineers in the Caucasus; he picked up folk-lore and folk-tales; he delved into the State archives to learn about rebels like Stepan Razin and Pugachev. But in the main his life was confined within narrow limits. He was never allowed to go abroad, and missed the enlargement of horizon which did so much for Byron and Shelley. Most of his life was spent in or near St. Petersburg or at his home in the country. He moved in high society, which gave him many subjects for personal poetry but did little to nurture his naturally Shakespearian gifts. In other times or in another country he might have turned his love of human beings to create a vast world of living persons. Indeed, if he had been born even twenty years later in Russia, he might have done in verse something equivalent to what the great novelists did in prose. But the time was against him and limited the play of his creative powers.

These restrictions were not without their compensations. They meant that Pushkin wrote not only narrative poems and plays about other people, but lyrical poems about himself which have a wonderful range and strength and skill. We

cannot complain of him, as we can of Shakespeare, that he tells us too little about himself. He is not only delightfully frank but able to make marvellous poetry about incidents which lesser men would find trivial and uninspiring. Like Camoes and Tasso, Pushkin is a master both of narrative and of lyrical poetry because his personal problems were too insistent to allow him to confine himself to the objective presentation of other men's lives. But more than Camoes or Tasso, Pushkin applies to his lyrical poetry the same kind of outlook which he gives to his narratives. For him each personal situation lives for its own sake and has a dramatic appeal for him. If he saw the world as a stage, he knew that he himself was one of the actors, and he watched his own life with a mixture of insight and detachment which makes every one of his lyrical poems the record of a dramatic episode, complete in itself and stirring because of the situation which it presents. Even when he unveils his innermost thoughts, Pushkin does not philosophise or draw general conclusions. What interests him in his own life is just the same kind of thing that interests him in the lives of others. That is why his lyrical poetry is different from that of Shelley or Leopardi or Lermontov. With all its candour and sweetness and astonishing truth to the emotions it remains somehow dramatic, and that is its special strength.

With such gifts Pushkin was fundamentally unlike the Romantic poets of his age who followed Byron in developing to the utmost their personal idiosyncrasies and treating the universe as a background for magnificent gestures. Though Pushkin was deeply impressed by Byron and learned much from him, his was not a Byronic personality, except in his discontent with his circumstances and his quarrel with the existing social scheme. He lacked Byron's capacity to make himself the centre of a world and to fit everything into it. Even when he wrote on what look like Byronic subjects in *The Gipsies* and *Poltava*, his sense of human beings and dramatic situations led him to produce an essentially different kind of poetry. Though he began *Evgeny Onegin* with the idea of making it a second *Don Juan*, he soon passed beyond this and made it an independent narrative in which his

personal tastes are kept to a subordinate place. He was not interested in cutting a figure before the world, and was quite incapable of pose. Though in his poetical world he himself plays a considerable part, he is by no means the only figure in it, and when he introduces other figures, he does so, not because they resemble himself or represent some unfulfilled ambition of his own, but because they engage his fancy and sympathy and understanding.

If Pushkin differed from Byron and the Byronic poets by the special character of his outlook, he differed no less in the quality of his art. It was their misfortune that in their devotion to their special experience they were often unable to submit their unrestrained temperaments to the stiff discipline which poetry demands. Pushkin, it is true, resembled the Romantics in being able to write poetry only when the creative fit was on him. Then he would work for days and nights on end, unconscious of everything except the poem which was forming itself in his mind. At last he would reappear with the finished work of art. So, we may imagine, Shakespeare too worked. But, unlike Shakespeare, Pushkin cannot be accused of never blotting a line. His manuscripts are as crowded as Flaubert's with erasures and corrections and second and third and fourth thoughts. All these came to him helter-skelter in the bustling, crowded process of composition. He differed completely from most of the Romantics in that his critical sense was excited at the same time as his creative powers. He had so clear an idea of what poetry ought to be and so sure a judgment in writing it that he did not cease composition until his highly critical taste was satisfied that every word was as right as he could make it.

Pushkin is, in fact, a classical writer. He certainly owed something to the classical past. Though he did not know Greek, he was well grounded in Latin, preferred Apuleius to Cicero at school, and later, when he was in Bessarabia, was led by the memory of Ovid's exile at Tomi to study his poetry. But he owed more to recent writers who wrote in a classical tradition, whether French poets of the eighteenth century or his own Russian forerunner and friend, Zhukovsky.

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When Pushkin began to write, Russian was still largely an unexploited language. Much, indeed, had been done to establish a metric and a style, but vast untried possibilities still lay open. In this respect Pushkin again resembles Shakespeare, who had at his disposal a language which had indeed been prepared for use but had not been fully exploited, still less ravaged. But while Shakespeare's English was a wild, exuberant, colloquial growth, which drew strength from all classes of society, Pushkin's Russian was largely confined to the language of educated people and conformed almost inevitably to the standards of elegance which the eighteenth century had sanctified. Although his lyrical poems are written in a wide variety of metres, and his plays in what was for Russians a new kind of blank verse, Pushkin had to operate with stricter forms than Shakespeare and to satisfy a prevailing taste for elegance and harmony. Of course he made many innovations and greatly enriched the language of Russian poetry, but he remains a classical poet in his finish, his neatness, his balance, his restraint.

Pushkin is also a classical poet in another sense. His poetry is indeed individual in that every word does its special work and the whole result is a unique thing which only he could have written. But this poetry is based on the familiar experience of ordinary men. Pushkin takes this, refines it, and makes the most of it, but it remains profoundly and essentially human in its truth to common life. This is not what his Romantic contemporaries do. They delight in the unfamiliar and the unknown, in their own original whims and fancies, and the less close these are to the familiar world, the more they like them. Pushkin was classical in his firm hold on the essential facts of human experience, on the feelings and thoughts of ordinary people. Even when he took what look like Romantic subjects and wrote fairy-tales or stories about primitive barbarians, he tried to pierce through the unfamiliar exterior to the fundamental humanity behind it. He knew that Gipsies and Caucasians were not in the least like his own circle, but he was less attracted by their remoteness from it than by a suspicion that in some ways they were more real. He explored human nature with

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the insight of genius, but always with an eye to its permanent and essential qualities. To appreciate his success we must look not to his contemporaries in any European country, but to great poets of the past who are concerned with the natural movements of the human heart and not with the exotic or the esoteric or the peculiar.

This classical outlook requires a master to make use of it. It falls too easily into formality or stiffness or pomposity. The demand for harmonious versification may mean that a poet secures it at the expense of his content. But when this manner is handled by a poet who has much of importance to say and is fully aware of both the limitations and the advantages of his medium, the result is sometimes a flawless blend of manner and matter. If the poet keeps his eye on the human appeal of his subject and makes every effort to present it fully, the classical manner has an irresistible simplicity, because it preserves the essential qualities of something keenly felt and vividly realised. In his use of words Pushkin may be compared with Racine. Though Racine's vocabulary is smaller and more stylised, and though he operates with almost a single metre, he resembles Pushkin in his combination of lucidity and power. In such poetry the depth and strength of what is said lose nothing by being completely clear. Perhaps, too, we may compare Pushkin with Virgil. Virgil is indeed more elaborate, but he too is concerned with the ordinary, familiar emotions. He understands them so well and finds so much in them that he has no need to explore unusual regions of the spirit. In these poets candour and passion fall naturally into a formal pattern and give life to it. That is the secret of the classical style, and one of the reasons for its perennial appeal.

Pushkin has an extraordinary simplicity both of manner and of content. Indeed, when we first read him, with our minds full perhaps of Dostoevsky and certainly expecting something wild and strange, we may find this simplicity disconcerting. It all seems very quiet, very neat, even unadventurous. Pushkin's subjects seldom give a shock of wild surprise. He seldom lets himself go with such denunciations of the universe as we find in Leopardi, whose life was almost

coterminous with his. The great poet of the most emotional and least inhibited of European peoples seems at first sight strangely self-controlled and to eschew any extravagance or excess. In translation he may even appear to be flat, since he lacks the qualities which survive most easily in translation — exciting themes, bold imagery, and violent effects. But when we read him closely and know him better, we find ourselves in the presence of a very unusual poetry, whose first quality is its effortless, direct approach to experience. Just because Pushkin understands so well the range and strength of human feelings, he is able to present them in what looks a very simple shape. This simplicity comes from inspired insight and embracing sympathy, from an understanding which knows its subject so well that it brushes aside anything which is not absolutely essential.

This simplicity is accompanied by a candour which is peculiarly Russian. Just as the great Russian novelists seem to be the only ones capable of telling what first love really is or of describing guilt and remorse, so Pushkin is able, without any protective irony or preparatory excuse, to speak of all kinds of emotion with complete frankness. A set of poems on Amalia Riznich illustrates his frankness and close observation of his own emotions. He was much in love with her, and one or two poems show the power of his passion. Then in 1825 he heard the news of her death, and, despite his love for her, he found that somehow the news did not distress him. He tells how he hears of it with indifference and is surprised that their passion, with its fire and stress and sweetness, its suffering and folly, should end like this. He looks in his heart and finds no sorrow and no regret. Only a Russian could speak like this ; only Pushkin could make a truly moving poem of it. Five years later, in 1830, Pushkin found himself assailed by memories of Amalia, whose death had meant so little to him, and this time he regrets her death bitterly in three of his finest poems. In one he summons her spirit from the grave because he wishes to tell her that he still loves her. In a second he imagines that he is kissing her, but feels that he is as dead to her in one way as she is to him in another, though none the less he sends her his greet-

ing, his farewell as a friend might say farewell to a friend before going into exile. In a third poem he reminds her of their last meeting, when they tore their lips apart and she promised to continue their embrace in her own southern land :

Но там, увы, где неба своды
Сияют в блеске голубом,
Где тень олив легла на воды,
Заснула ты последним сном.
Твоя краса, твои страданья
Исчезли в урне гробовой---
А с ним и поцелуй свиданья...
Но жду его... он за тобой.

(But there, alas! where azure gleam
Irradiates the vaulted skies,
Beneath the cliff where waters dream,¹
You fell asleep, no more to rise.
Your beauty in the grave's abyss
Has vanished, and your misery —
Gone is the resurrection kiss . . .
I wait for it. It is for me.)

(Maurice Baring)

This is the simplicity of the heart which has no truck with poses or pretences and must speak the truth. It is presented in words no less simple, and direct, and passionate.

This simplicity in no way impoverishes Pushkin's poetry but enriches it by its concentration on what really matters. When he sought to get every word right, he was guided by a desire to secure the greatest possible richness of content, to extract from a situation all that was most exciting and most exalting in it. He was capable of most emotions from rapturous joy to black despair ; he was not above pride and envy ; he had moments of sharp irony and savage abuse. Whatever the occasion might be, he made the most of it. That is why he is a great poet of love. He does not try, like Shelley, to reduce all the manifestations of love to a celestial pattern, nor, like Byron, is he suspicious of even the most

¹ The translation follows a text which is almost certainly not that which Pushkin wrote. We might, in the interests of accuracy, emend this line to

By olive-trees where waters dream.

tender and innocent affections. Pushkin knows the whole gamut of love from his own experience, and that is why he understands it so well in others. He fell in love with many women, and on each occasion surrendered himself completely to it. With his embracing sympathy he needed someone to whom he could give his devotion, some altar on which to lay his heart. Love was the full expression of his tenderness and need for affection and worship. It brought out his noblest qualities and even awoke religious feelings of joy and sanctity. In his lines to Anna Kern he tells how her reappearance in his life wakens him to God, inspiration, life, tears, and love. In his chaste and exalted *The Beauty* he speaks of the impression, akin to a sense of holiness, which a beautiful woman makes on him. In an incomparable poem of eight lines, addressed to an unnamed woman who has never known of his devotion, he reveals the generous and tender nature of a love which still survives when its hopeless passion is finished :

Я вас любил; любовь еще, быть-может,
В душе моей угасла не совсем;
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.
Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
То робостью, то ревностью тоним;
Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,
Как дай вам Бог любимой быть другим.

(I loved you once, and in my soul, maybe,
Love is not altogether dead to-day.
But you shall not be troubled more by me ;
I would not sadden you in any way.
I loved you silently and hopelessly,
Racked now by jealousy and now by shame ;
I loved so truly and so tenderly —
God grant some other's love may be the same.)

Pushkin displays the same strength and purity of passion when he describes love in others, from the self-sacrificing devotion of the girl in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* to Tatyana's first love for Onegin, or Maria's wild and fatal passion for Mazepa. It is not merely that this poetry lacks anything false

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or pretentious or that Pushkin never over-dramatises himself or his characters : it is rather that he sees a situation so clearly and responds to it so warmly that he goes straight to its heart and grasps its essential nature.

This poetry is firmly founded in truth. Pushkin matched his keen intelligence with a scrupulous honesty. His wide sympathy did not beguile him into misinterpreting the real elements of a situation, nor did he falsify anything in order to make it more exciting. Again and again he refuses to shirk the implications of a subject or to make it conform to some conventional idea of human behaviour. This gift may be seen abundantly in his dramas and narrative poems. It informs his portrait of Onegin, who is neither good nor bad, but an average man spoiled by idleness and boredom ; of Zemfira in *The Gipsies*, a wild creature who follows her emotions so faithfully that, when she ceases to love a man, she cannot keep up any pretences ; of Marina in *Boris Godunov*, who knows that Dmitri is an impostor but is fascinated by his reckless dreams of power and his shameless self-confidence ; of the old traitor, Mazepa, who accepts a young girl's love and then sacrifices it to his own relentless ambition. Such characters, and others like them, are built not from abstract ideas or dreaming desires but from a keen, sometimes ruthless, examination of life. Pushkin drew much of his dramatic power from this unflinching insight. All his situations are built firmly on human nature. The result is that we understand at once what he means and do not have to make any awkward adjustments to appreciate his poetry.

Pushkin's sense of truth is part of his delightful sanity. Perhaps sanity on this scale is not a quality for which we usually look in Russian writers. It may be present often enough in the great novelists and the later poets, but it is not what we love them for or most admire in them. Indeed, we are so accustomed to talk of the Russian soul and its agonies and frenzies that sanity like Pushkin's may even seem alien to the most authentic manifestations of the Russian genius. We are liable to look in his poetry for what Virginia Woolf calls 'this cloudy, yeasty, precious stuff, the soul'.

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With Dostoevski and Blok, with Chekhov and Esenin, this is right enough. But it is not right with Pushkin. However much he did to form Russian poetry and the Russian character, he did not form the Russian notion of the soul in its more advanced and more reckless manifestations. That was perhaps the work of Nekrasov, though no doubt he merely gave expression to something already existing in many men and women. Pushkin was different. He was absorbed by human nature in many of its aspects ; he examined it with sympathy and love, but not with violent apprehensions about its salvation or damnation or with searching questions about the worth of even the smallest actions before the Throne of Grace. He had a profound sense of good and evil, but his wide understanding did not allow him to condemn anyone about whom he did not know the full facts. His sanity kept him to his task of giving to men and women a wide and imaginative sympathy, but forbade him to take greater risks.

Pushkin's poetry is so rich and satisfying that we hardly feel any need to look for a consistent philosophy in it or to ask what his ultimate vision of life is. No doubt he himself would have said that he had nothing of the kind, but was content to interpret what came to him through the mood and insight of the moment. At first sight we may well think that he has no unifying outlook. He was a man of many contradictions and allowed them to appear in his poetry. Though he disliked the domineering methods of Nicholas I and suffered much from them, he once at least praised him in all honesty for his generosity. At one time he would regard the universe as governed by a merciless destiny, at another speak in the language of devout Christian faith. His liberal conception of Russia's destiny did not prevent him from outbursts of bellicose patriotism. But such inconsistencies were merely the result of his impressionable nature. When he said a thing, he believed it; and there is no possible doubt of his sincerity. Such a man might well have no final philosophy, and it would be quite understandable if he never made up his mind on certain fundamental questions. This indeed might be argued. Though his narratives and plays

have certain leading ideas which shape their course, they do not come to explicit conclusions or even force us to such emotional judgments as Shakespeare does. We might well think that the human scene was enough for Pushkin, and that he loved it so much that he did not wish to make it conform to any metaphysical scheme.

Yet if we look at the succession of Pushkin's great works, we see something developing which is, if not a guiding idea, at least a frame of mind, a way of arranging and interpreting experience, an assertion of certain contrasts and conflicts. No doubt Pushkin was largely unconscious of this line of thought because it was forced on him by circumstances in his own life. It is an ever-growing concern about the relation of the ordinary individual to powers which dominate and hamper him. Pushkin's life may well account for his persistent interest in this subject. At the Lycée of Tsarskoe Selo he had, in his inspired and marvellous boyhood, known an enchanting carelessness and irresponsibility. His schooldays were indeed the happiest of his life. He made friendships which lasted till death ; he fell in love ; he wrote his first poems ; he made innumerable jokes about his teachers and his companions. Never did a man of genius have so full and happy a boyhood as Pushkin, or regret it so keenly ever afterwards. Until death Pushkin would have liked to regain this lost happiness, to be once again his full, unhampered, reckless, boyish self. The malice of circumstances forbade. Pushkin was frustrated by inadequate means, by a none too suitable marriage, by the rasping supervision of his work conducted by the Tsar through Count Benckendorff, by many kinds of humiliating restrictions, and by his own jealous temperament which brought him to death at the age of thirty-seven in a duel fought over his wife's honour. Pushkin, who was capable of exultant joy and liked most kinds of pleasure, suffered miserably from the lack of liberty. He wished to be free absolutely, to be magnificently and unmistakably himself, to fulfil his nature as he knew that, if circumstances only allowed, he could. How bitterly he felt in his last years that he had failed may be seen from some lines which he wrote to his wife :

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Пора, мой друг, пора! покоя сердце просит —
Летят за днями дни, и каждый час уносит
Частичку бытия — а мы с тобой вдвоем
Предполагаем жить, и глядь — как раз — умрем.

На свете счастья нет, но есть покой и воля.
Давно завидная мечтается мне доля —
Давно, усталый раб, замыслил я побег
В обитель дальнюю трудов и чистых нег.

('Tis time, my friend, 'tis time. For rest the heart is aching.
Day follows day in flight, and every hour is taking
Life's little pieces, while together you and I
Make plans to live. But look how soon we both shall die.

Not happiness — but rest and freedom life possesses.
Long to an envied fate my dreaming fancy presses,
And long, a worn-out lackey, I have plotted flight
To some far cloister where are work and chaste delight.)

When he wrote these lines, Pushkin had begun to give up the unequal struggle, but the desire for freedom was still strong in him, even if it was only for freedom from a round of wearisome and humiliating duties. The conflict between this obsessing desire and his inhibiting circumstances accounts for much in the development of his poetry and a certain pattern in his creative life.

In his longer works the issues with which Pushkin deals fall into a kind of pattern which suggests an individual, if not very articulate, metaphysic. He presents life as divided into two parts which are almost necessarily hostile to one another. On the one side is the world of ordinary men and women, creatures of emotion and passion, longing to enjoy freedom and happiness. Some of them are entirely charming and delightful; others are hard and even sinister. But all alike are human in their desire to follow their own ambitions and satisfy their own desires. Despite their efforts, they are doomed to failure or disaster, and good and bad alike are foiled by circumstances. On the other side Pushkin sets great powers, present perhaps in the government of the universe but more obviously at work in human life, whether in some men, who are unlike the rest of their kind in their

prodigious energy and ruthless love of power, or in systems of society and government, which deny or ruin the happiness of their subjects, or even in ordinary human beings whose natural instincts are crossed and countered by strange, alien flashes of destructive energy. These powers, wherever they are to be found, are formidable, relentless, and inhuman, but somehow impressive and always to be treated with respect and fear. Sooner or later the one class comes into conflict with the other, and the second invariably wins. In depicting this struggle Pushkin was as impartial as a man could be. Wherever his own sympathies might lie, to whichever class he felt himself to belong, he was too scrupulous and too sensitive not to present both sides with dispassionate justice and understanding. His poetical universe is built on the struggle between the common desires of men and women and incalculable powers, within and without them, which break into their lives and defeat them.

Pushkin sometimes treats of this struggle at a human and indeed a political level. He is one of the first European poets to make political power an almost absolute element. Sophocles and Dante deal with it, but in relation to wider schemes of existence and value ; Pushkin makes it live in its own right, beyond explanation or appeal. His attitude towards it is curiously ambiguous. On the one hand it fascinates him, and he finds a notable example of it in Peter the Great. Pushkin spent some time in studying the history of Peter's reign ; he liked to recall that he himself was descended from Peter's Abyssinian, the ruthless and furious Hannibal; he liked almost everything about Peter and implicitly exalts him as what a Tsar ought to be. In *Poltava* Peter is the authentic hero, the superman, who gains glory through violent action. When he suddenly makes his appearance, we feel ourselves in the presence of some daemonic being :

Из шатра,
Толпой любимцев окруженный,
Выходит Петр. Его глаза
Сияют. Лик его ужасен.
Движенья быстры. Он прекрасен,
Он весь, как Божья гроза.

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(Surrounded
By followers, the best preferred,
Came Peter, as he spoke the word,
Out of his tent. His eyes shone brightly,
His face struck terror. Swiftly, lightly,
Moved Peter, wearing, as he trod,
The splendour of the wrath of God.)

(Oliver Elton)

This is what Pushkin sees in the embodiment of imperial power, and there is no doubt of his admiration for it.

On the other hand, Pushkin also saw that such power has its ruthless and even hideous side. He created his myth for this in his poem *Anchar*. It tells of the upas-tree, which grows in the desert and oozes a poison which pollutes the air and allows no bird or beast to come near. One day a King sends his servant to gather the poison. He does so and brings it back to the King, only to die at once from it. The King then dips his arrows in it and uses them to spread death and destruction among all his neighbours. Into this poem Pushkin puts ideas and emotions which are almost antithetical to those which he puts into *Poltava*. The King, who sends for the poison, has no motives other than the exercise of power and destruction for their own sakes. In this he resembles the tree which was born on a day of wrath and feeds its leaves and roots on poison. In a world of natural things it is unnatural in that it destroys life and is shunned by everything alive. Even the winds flee from it, and its only company is the sand at its roots which receives the venomous dew from its branches. So, too, the King is an unnatural monster among men. His only motive is the lust of power, and this leads him to destroy. Such a creature has no regard for his servants and sacrifices them to his cold, abstract, unnatural purpose. This is the other side to Pushkin's complex notion of power. If Peter at Poltava shows its glory, the King shows its horror and savagery.

In this dual system Pushkin had, no doubt, his personal preferences. In his own life he suffered too much from the heartless whims of imperial power not to feel abundant sympathy for the oppressed. At times he could hardly avoid

giving the impression that he thinks such power abhorrent and its results evil. In *Poltava* the girl, Maria, goes mad because her husband, Mazepa, who is himself a traitor, has her father executed on a false charge of treachery. He desires power for its own sake, and for it turns to treachery and murder. His wife's happiness is of no importance to him in comparison with his ambitions, and though in the end he fails to get what he wants, he feels no remorse for his vile doings. In *Mozart and Salieri* Salieri poisons Mozart because he cannot endure that a man so gifted should be alive. He tries to justify himself with sophistries, but he does not convince even himself, and indeed his malignity is almost without motive, the instinctive hatred of the cold and uncreative pedant for the warm and abundant genius. In these two cases the principle of destruction is closely allied to the love of power. Mazepa and Salieri cease to be human when their dominating passion is aroused, and their victims, Maria and Mozart, are human beings who have their full share of life and gaiety and suspect no evil in those who destroy them. Through such stories Pushkin shows his sense of a conflict in which the lust for power murders many delightful natural things.

Yet, despite his personal inclinations, Pushkin kept his impartiality on this central issue. He continued to feel the appeal of power and to admit its hold on him. He balanced the competing claims and gave the final expression of his view in *The Bronze Horseman*, in which the issue is raised almost to a metaphysical plane. On one side is the pathetic Evgeny, whose life is ruined when his betrothed dies in a great flood and whose crazed wits are haunted by the statue of Peter the Great which he frequents. There is no denying that Evgeny has a profound and even tragic pathos and is a symbol of ordinary men who are broken alike by circumstances and by a social system over which they have no control. But that is only half the picture. The other half consists of Pushkin's obvious admiration for the granite city which Peter the Great, in defiance of natural conditions, built on the Neva marshes, and of his sense of awe before the great monarch whose statue becomes an emblem of incarnate

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power, as it haunts the insane Evgeny and makes him think that he is pursued by it:

И он по площади пустой
Бежит и слышит за собой —
Как будто грома грохотанье —
Тяжело-звонкое скаканье
По потрясенной мостовой,
И озаарен дуною бледной,
Простерши руку в вышине,
За ним несется Всадник Медный
На звонко-скачущем коне;
И во всю ночь безумец бедный
Куда стопы ни обращал,
За ним повсюду Всадник Медный
С тяжелым топотом скакал.

(And rushing through the empty square,
He hears behind him as it were
Thunders that rattle in a chorus,
A gallop ponderous, sonorous,
That shakes the pavement. At full height,
Illumined by the pale moonlight,
With arm outflung, behind him riding
See, the bronze horseman comes, bestriding
The charger clanging in his flight.
All night the madman flees; no matter
Where he may wander at his will,
Hard on his track with heavy clatter
There the bronze horseman gallops still.)
(Oliver Elton)

If Evgeny appeals to us by his helpless pathos and is a fit example of all human beings whose lives are ruined by ruthless power, the Bronze Horseman has his own magnificence and awakes at least awe and fear.

Pushkin's dual system of power and pathos, of inscrutable, inhuman forces, and an all too human humanity, resembles in some ways that of the Attic tragedians. Just as he saw life dominated by relentless and awful powers, so in their gods the Greeks saw not dissimilar beings, radiant indeed and alluring but remote and merciless. If Pushkin believed that

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life is ultimately at the mercy of powerful forces, he knew that these are also to be found in ourselves and our systems, that they are within and without us. So, too, the Greeks might set their gods on Olympus but know that they work also in the hearts of men. Indeed, we may press the comparison farther. For, just as Pushkin's characters fail through their desire to be too fully themselves, so the Greeks attributed many disasters to the desire of men to get more than the rules of life allow. In such a system the defeated call for compassion and the victors for awe. The poet, whether Pushkin or Sophocles, sees both sides of the conflict and understands them equally.

Yet Pushkin's outlook is not ultimately like that of the Greeks. The Greeks believed that in the last analysis man is but a shadow in a dream and that all his ambitions and efforts are as nothing : let him remember this and be humble. But Pushkin loves his human creatures and never questions the ultimate worth of their happiness. He brings his opposing elements together in fierce conflicts, but in these he finds something thrilling and exciting, a challenge and an inspiration. In his *Feast at the Time of Plague* he dramatises the exaltation which men feel in the immediate presence of death. The very thought that everything will soon be finished only makes it more delightful and more worth having. In his own way Pushkin has a tragic outlook. He holds out no hope of compensations for suffering ; he does not suggest that the universe is ultimately either right or reasonable ; he insists that the most delightful people are the most likely to come to disaster. But the paradox of Pushkin's tragic outlook is that it makes him a poet of joy. Though some of his assumptions are basically as pessimistic as Leopardi's, he draws exactly opposite conclusions from them. When he surveyed his own failures and defeats or was haunted by regret and remorse, his answer was not to wish for annihilation but to look forward to new moments of delight :

Но не хочу, о други, умирать !
Я жить хочу, чтоб мыслить и страдать ;
И ведаю, мне будут наслажденья
Меж горестей, забот и тревожиенья :

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Порой опять гармонией упьюсь,
Над вымыслом слезами обольюсь,
И, может-быть, на мой закат печальный
Блеснет любовь улыбкою прощальной.

(But oh! my friends, I do not ask to die!
I crave more life, more dreams, more agony!
Midmost the care, the panic, the distress,
I know that I shall taste of happiness.
Once more I shall be drunk on strains divine,
Be moved to tears by musings that are mine,
And haply when the last sad hour draws nigh,
Love with a farewell smile may gild the sky.)
(Maurice Baring)

This was the kind of life which Pushkin desired for himself and for others. If he had a philosophy, it was that the cruel conditions of existence can best be defied if in the time at our disposal we try to be most truly ourselves and to make the most of our natural desire for affection and joy.

IX

LERMONTOV

WITHIN a few days of Pushkin's death on 29 January 1837 the reading public of St. Petersburg was presented with a poem called *Death of a Poet*, written by a Hussar officer in the Imperial Guard who was twenty-two years old and called Mikhail Lermontov. If this poem begins as a lament for the sudden destruction of a great genius, it ends as a fierce rebellious denunciation of the Russian ruling classes, and especially of the parasites who swarm round the throne and murder freedom, genius, and glory, and warns them that vengeance will fall upon them. Lermontov was stirred by a justifiable suspicion that Pushkin's death had been desired by the court and that the Tsar Nicholas I was not displeased by it. *Death of a Poet* soon came to the notice of the authorities, especially of Count Benckendorff, who had long harried Pushkin and was quick to detect any criticism which savoured of indiscipline. Lermontov was first put under arrest and then exiled to the Caucasus. He did not stay there long, but was back in St. Petersburg before the end of 1838. But this outbreak into politics marked a crisis in his career. Henceforward the young officer, known chiefly for his difficult temper and vagrant amours, was marked equally by those who watched with eager expectancy for any new manifestation of Russian poetry and by those who kept suspicious guard against any symptoms of intellectual independence. More than this, it was a turning-point in Lermontov's own career. With the death of Pushkin he discovered the full measure of his poetical calling. From now onwards until his death in 1841 he wrote with an accomplished mastery and a secure knowledge of his capacities. The mantle of Pushkin had fallen on him, and he was confident of his ability to wear it worthily.

Though the collected works of Lermontov contain a bulk of poetry surprisingly large for a man who died at the age of twenty-six, yet he himself was slow to publish and published only what satisfied his own highly exacting standards. In his lifetime he published his novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, and one volume of lyrical verse, which contains only twenty-eight poems out of the 400 and more which he is now known to have written, and includes among these twenty-eight four translations from German or English. Lermontov was an extremely severe critic of his own work and passed nothing which he did not think to be as good as he could make it. It is unfair to judge him by the whole bulk of his work. Much of it is undeniably sentimental and imperfect, but what else is to be expected from a boy still in his teens? At the same time, even among the pieces which he himself did not think worthy of publication are some which have won an enormous popularity and are known to every Russian. He was by nature an abundant writer who controlled his abundance with searching criticism, and in any judgment on him we should remember that he was himself the harshest judge of his own work. He lived no longer than Keats, and, like Keats, he did not find his full powers before the last four or five years of his life, but, unlike Keats, he did not hurry into print but waited until he was certain that he had done his best.

Lermontov's life concerns us only so far as it explains his poetry. Like Pushkin, he came from the lesser nobility and claimed a long and distinguished ancestry. His mother died when he was a small child, and the affection which he lost in her was not adequately replaced by the attentions of his grandparents. He had an excellent education, spoke French like a Frenchman and was well at home in German, English, and Italian. But when he went to the University of Moscow, he benefited little by it, did not make the acquaintance of distinguished fellow students like Belinsky and Konstantin Aksakov, kept aloof in haughty contempt for the fine talk of his contemporaries, and was finally expelled for a mild misdemeanor. In 1834 he became an officer of Hussars and flung himself into the smart, fast life of the capital. After his return from exile in 1838 he continued to cause anxiety

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to the authorities. In 1840 he was punished for a duel with the son of the French ambassador by being sent into exile again to the Caucasus, returned towards the end of the year, and then went back to the Caucasus, where on 15 July 1841 he was killed in a duel, in which he did not attempt to defend himself, by a friend, Major Nikolai Martynov, whom he had infuriated by his gibes. In the intervals of pleasure, love-making, military service, in which he acquitted himself with great distinction, and quarrelling alike with enemies and friends, Lermontov wrote his poetry. He died at the same age as Keats, but unlike him he showed no signs of slackening powers at the end. If he is in some sense an 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown', it is only because his mature verse is small in quantity. We may be certain that, if he had lived, he would have written more and even better poetry.

Unlike Pushkin, Lermontov did not pass weeks and months in bored idleness only to burst into inexplicable, unforeseen flights of creative activity. In his busy life he wrote poetry whenever occasion allowed, even in the intervals of battle. When the impulse came to him, he would emend his first draft with remorseless excisions and inspired corrections. If a draft did not please him, he would put it aside, only to return to it later and remake it or use its best lines for some new poem. Thus he began *The Demon* in 1829, continued it in 1835, rewrote it in 1840, and finished a final version just before his death in 1841. The different texts show how hard he worked at it, how he tried always to make his verse firmer and fuller, how he removed any phrases that smacked of indecision or vagueness. So, too, his ability to put earlier lines to a new purpose can be seen from some, of which the first idea came to him in 1830. In 1832 he extended them in a poem about himself, and in 1839 included them in his memorial stanzas on Alexander Odoevsky, the Decembrist, of whom they provide a noble characterisation :

Он был рожден для них, для тех надежд,
Поэзии и счастья... но, безумный —
Из детских ран вырвался одежд
И сердце бросил в море жизни шумной,
И свет не пощадил — и Бог не спас!

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(He had been born for them, for hopes like those,
For poetry and joy. But madly he
Soon cast his childhood's clothes away and chose
To fling his heart on life's tumultuous sea.
The world was ruthless, and God spared him not!)

Very few poets are so self-controlled or so far-sighted as this. With all his abundance, Lermontov was so good a critic that he was able to hoard his best lines until he could put them to a truly appropriate use.

In the eyes of his keener contemporaries and of his countrymen ever afterwards Lermontov inherited the mantle of Pushkin and began where the dead poet ended. In 1840 Belinsky said of him : ' In that young man a third Russian poet is getting ready, and Pushkin did not die without an heir'. There is truth in this if we take it to mean not that Lermontov continued to work in the same way as Pushkin but that he followed his own temperament to develop much that Pushkin had begun. This is certainly the case with his style. Pushkin's style, with its simplicity and its strength, its effortless variety and tremendous charge of emotion, taught Lermontov how to write. He too makes every word do its work and every line say all that it can. But if Pushkin is simple, Lermontov is simpler still. He conforms, as very few poets do, to Wordsworth's prescription for the language of poetry, and does it with so unassuming an air that we hardly notice his style as such, so perfectly wedded is it to his mood and his purpose. Every word comes so inevitably and so naturally into the sentence that we mark not the choice of words but their final effect. But of course this is a triumph of style. Hardly any poets have written with quite this ease and self-effacing simplicity, and yet succeeded in being powerful and expressive. Lermontov lacks Pushkin's caressing sweetness and gift for suggesting a whole complex mood, but he almost makes up for it by a sheer force which strikes us directly as a powerful response to experience. When early in the present century advanced Russian poets, eager to exploit neglected qualities in their language, claimed that Pushkin was too sweet and too Italian, they did not say the same of Lermontov, whom they regarded as a more masculine,

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more forcible writer. The judgment is hardly just when we think of *Poltava* or *The Bronze Horseman*, but there is an element of truth in it in so far as it stresses Lermontov's concentrated force and confidence.

Lermontov's choice and use of words may be illustrated from his translation of Thomas Moore's *The Evening Gun*, which is one of Moore's better ventures and, if not very important or unusual, is true to its own kind of sentiment:

Rememb'rest thou that setting sun,
The last I saw with thee,
When loud we heard the ev'ning gun
Peal o'er the twilight sea ?
Boom! — the sounds appeared to sweep
Far o'er the verge of day,
Till into realms beyond the deep,
They seem'd to die away.

Oft when the toils of day are done,
In pensive dreams of thee,
I sit to hear that ev'ning gun
Peal o'er the stormy sea,
Boom! — and while, o'er billows curl'd,
The distant sounds decay,
I weep and wish, from this rough world,
Like them to die away.

In his translation Lermontov not only keeps the sequence of thought and the same number of lines but adds nothing of his own. Yet his poem is quite different in tone, partly because he uses only eight-syllabled lines, but more because he has made the whole sentiment less sweet and more poignant:

Ты помнишь ли, как мы с тобою
Прощались позднюю порою?
Вечерний выстрел загремел,
И мы с воплем внимали...
Тогда лучи уж догорали,
И на море туман густел;
Удар с усилием промчался
И вдруг за бездну скончался.

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Окончив труд дневных работ
Я часто о тебе мечтаю,
Бродя вблизи пустынных вод,
Вечерним выстрелам внимаю.
И между тем как чередой
Глушит волнами их седыми,
Я плачу, я томим тоской,
Я умереть желаю с ними...

(Do you recall how you and I,
When dusk was falling, said good-bye ?
Loud boomed the cannon's curfew sound.
To it across the waves we listened.
The failing lights no longer glistened,
And on the sea mist gathered round.
The straining shock passed through the air,
Then suddenly died everywhere.

When the day's work is done at last,
How often are my dreams about you!
The empty sea I wander past
And hear the curfew-gun without you.
When its loud echo comes again
From the gray waters back to me,
I weep and long to end my pain
By dying with that sound at sea.)

The change owes much to Lermontov's style, which is more straightforward than Moore's and closer to common speech. Not only does he eschew anything resembling such artificial phrases as 'pensive dreams' and 'billows curl'd', but he leads up to a stronger climax at the end. This is the work of a man who uses words with the utmost economy and sense of their reserves of power.

This style Lermontov applied to an extremely personal experience. Like Pushkin, he wrote about himself and his emotions and knew nothing stronger than his aching desire for liberty. But he was born fifteen years after Pushkin and looked on the world with fewer and fainter hopes. He never knew the fervour for reform which ended so catastrophically with the failure of the Decembrist revolt in 1825, and for him the call of the French Revolution was lost in an irrecoverable past. He grew to manhood in the police-state of Nicholas

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I, when any independence was likely to be punished and finer spirits suffered from a conviction of futility and impotence. By nature he was a rebel, if not in a political sense, at least against the crassness and cruelties of the established order, and it is significant that, when he was a child, he would brandish his fists at his grandmother for maltreating her serfs. Like Pushkin, he longed for some unattainable freedom in which he could be uncompromisingly himself without checks or obligations, but he was born too late to think that this was even conceivable. Whatever he might desire in the depth of his being, he was convinced that he would never find it and that he was trapped in a way of life from which there was no release. This conviction, which was fully justified, was strengthened by something which had troubled him since childhood, a vague sense of homesickness for some lost happiness, a 'hunger for eternity', a longing for a supernatural exaltation. In *Angel*, written when he was seventeen, he gives expression to this feeling and sets forth the fancy that the soul at birth hears an angel's song and is ever afterwards haunted by it:

И долго на свете томилась она
Желаньем чудным полна,
И звуков небес заменить не могли
Ей скучные песни земли.

(Long after on earth when the soul would tire,
It felt a strange aching desire
For the music of heaven which it sought for in vain
In earth's songs of sorrow and pain.)

(V. de S. Pinto)

Deep in Lermontov lay a longing for something irretrievably lost, and the quality of this longing shows how far his temperament is removed from Pushkin's. Pushkin indeed had his hours of homesickness, but it was quite simply for the marvellous life of his schooldays ; in Lermontov it is for some supernatural world lost in childhood and dimly remembered through haunting echoes.

This sense of frustration fostered a deep discontent in Lermontov and led him even in youth to two almost incon-

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sistent positions, a fierce scepticism and a no less fierce desire for action. The first is common enough in imaginative youth, but Lermontov held it with an uncommon force. In *The Cup of Life* he expresses with memorable pathos a sensitive schoolboy's sense of unreality in everything around him, and tells how, as we drink from the cup of life, the brim is wet with our tears until death comes and shows that it is all an illusion:

Тогда мы видим, что пуста
Была золотая чаша,
Что в ней напиток был — мечта,
И что она — не наша!

(Oh then we see the golden cup
Was empty in its gleaming,
That only dreams had filled it up,
Nor even ours the dreaming.)

Lermontov was only seventeen when he wrote this, and it lacks his mature care and finality, but none the less it shows what he felt in his youth and forecasts much that he was to feel later. From this sense of being duped he never escaped. He fought against it and did his best to counter it, but it lay deep in his being and was never quite eliminated. Another early poem, *A Sail*, shows his chief means of combating it. He sees a ship sailing on the sea, asks why it behaves as it does, and finds his answer :

Под ним струя светлей лазури,
Над ним луч солнца золотой: —
А он, мятежный, просит бури,
Как будто в бурях есть покой!

(Beneath, the azure current floweth ;
Above, the golden sunlight glows.
Rebellious, the storms it wooeth,
As if the storms could give repose.)

To escape from his melancholy uncertainties Lermontov sought excitement and adventure both in life and in imagination. The main lines on which he was to move were set in boyhood, and to them he remained constant.

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Externally Lermontov was a man of the world, a frequenter of high society, feared and disliked for his cruel jokes, the author of obscene verses, the reckless, inconstant lover, the poet who claimed to have no interest in his poetry and refused to talk about it. This appearance was much more than a pose. Lermontov almost believed in it and put much of it into Pechorin in *A Hero of Our Time*, who says of himself :

Why was I born ? And I think there was a reason, and I think I was called to high things ; for I feel in my soul the presence of vast powers ; but I did not divine my high calling ; I gave myself up to the allurements of shallow and ignoble passions ; I emerged from their furnace as hard and as cold as iron ; but I had lost for ever the ardour of noble aspirations, the flower of life. And since then how often have I played the part of the axe in the hands of fate. Like the weapon of the executioner I have fallen on the necks of the victims, often without malice, always without pity. My love has never brought happiness, because I have never in the slightest degree sacrificed myself to those whom I loved. I loved for my own sake, for my own pleasure.

So far as his actions are concerned, the words may well be applied to Lermontov. At least this was how his contemporaries saw him. These elements were certainly in his nature and at times entered into his poetry. But behind this outer self was another, more human and more interesting. So Belinsky, who was among the first to divine Lermontov's genius, and visited him when he was under arrest in 1837, found a man quite different from what he expected :

The first few minutes I felt awkward, but later we somehow got engaged in a discussion of English literature. . . . I looked at him and could not believe my eyes or my ears. His face assumed such a natural expression ; he was his own self for the moment. There was so much truth and simplicity in his words ! For the first time I saw the genuine Lermontov, such as I have always wished to see him.

When he was away from society, for which he had adopted a protective colouring, Lermontov was a different man, and a simpler, more natural self emerged behind the hard-bitten man of the world.

In his contradictions Lermontov shows a remarkable resemblance to Byron. In both we find a touch of the cad and the rake countered by genuine tenderness and affection ; an

affectation of contempt for their own poetry because they were afraid that others might despise it; a way of deriding much that in their best moments they treated seriously; a respect and a liking for high society which was poorly dissimulated under a contempt for it but matched by sudden longings for solitude and the companionship of nature; an insistence on their noble birth and a liking for simple peasants or warlike barbarians in Greece or Georgia; a zest for pleasure in many forms and an ability to endure hard conditions by considerable self-denial; an abundant vitality combined with an appetite for danger and a disregard for death. No doubt this similarity was partly due to similarities in upbringing and social circumstances. Both seem to have been starved of maternal affection in childhood and to have been dubious whether any real love could last or even exist; both were welcomed by high society, only to find themselves despised or ostracised by it; both longed to be fully and freely themselves in a world dominated by strict rules and conventions. But these similarities are matched by differences no less important. Unlike Byron, Lermontov never woke up to find himself famous, never enjoyed a handsome income from his books, never got away from a mode of life which he detested to choose another which suited him, never established relations with a woman comparable to Byron's with La Guiccioli. Greater than these differences in their lives are the differences in their work. Though Lermontov had indeed the Byronic temperament, though he read and admired Byron and learned something from him, his poetry is quite independent. He never admits to it the kind of wit which he practised so recklessly in his life and which Byron used so gloriously in *Don Juan*. When he wrote poetry, Lermontov shed his social self and became a different man. Moreover, Byron took very little trouble with his poetry, poured it out in careless abundance, and left it at that, but Lermontov was an extremely conscientious and critical artist, who worked hard on every word and was content only with his very best. The result is that we think of him more as a poet than as a personality, or at least as a personality only because he is a poet.

Lermontov's poetry reflects his conflict with himself. He

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was cynical because he felt that the world had defeated him. In boyhood he had longed for some ideal, unattainable condition, and, when he failed to find it, he compromised with the world and treated it, as he thought it deserved, by going further than most men in the reckless, hard-hearted spirit which prevailed in society. But behind this we can see that his cynicism was largely due to his bitter conviction that his most cherished hopes would never be fulfilled. He longed for affection, but found that women were faithless and that friends betrayed him ; he was as patriotic as any Russian, but his country was governed by the sycophants of a pedantic tyrant, and he turned on it with savage indignation ; he felt the lure of aristocratic life at St. Petersburg, only to find that he must listen to the hackneyed words of people without souls and be surrounded by 'masks frigid with propriety'. He had neither the experience nor the means to break with this life, and indeed there was nothing for him to do. The rigid system of the Tsars made no allowance for misfits, and Lermontov was at least fortunate in being exiled to the Caucasus. Even at the front his heroic actions brought him no benefit. The Tsar ignored his citations for bravery and commendations for awards. Lermontov was inexorably condemned to a conflict between his innermost desires and the hard system which held him in captivity.

What his temperament and circumstances cost Lermontov, and what they did for his poetry, may be seen from his treatment of love. Like Pushkin, he fell in love often and wrote about it from many angles, but, unlike Pushkin, he says very little of its happiest or most tender moments. Sometimes indeed he seems to write in the moment of falling in love, but it is rather a moment of magic when he hears a beautiful voice which seems to promise everything. There is nothing in his work comparable to Pushkin's stanzas to Anna Kern or *The Beauty*. Lermontov's treatment of love is more complex and more oblique. We may suspect that, when he fell in love, he never did so quite completely, because he was always troubled by fears or doubts or disturbing memories. It is characteristic of him that some of his finest work tells of love which has gone wrong, like the poem to the Countess

Rostopchin, in which he compares himself and her to two waves flowing together at sea until a rock divides them. He seems to have known the full power of love only when he had lost it. Then indeed he might feel gratitude and affection, but it is for something that might have been, or for a memory which is sweet in retrospect and more real from a distance. We cannot doubt the genuine affection of such a poem as this, but it is an affection salvaged from the past :

Расстались мы, но твой портрет
Я на груди моей храню:
Как бледный призрак лучших лет
Он душу радует мою.

И новым преданный страстям
Я разлюбить его не мог:
Так храм оставленный — всё храм,
Кумир поверженный — всё бог!

(We parted, but your portrait stays
With me, inviolate on my breast;
Like a pale ghost of better days,
It keeps my spirit blithe and blest.

What though new passions rule my will ?
I have not ceased to love. Untrod
The temple is a temple still,
The fallen idol still a god.)

From love Lermontov extracts a peculiar pathos, but it is the pathos of defeat and regret.

This sense of failure sometimes takes forms which are none the less true for their strangeness and touch of violence. Even when all is well, Lermontov is troubled by fear and suspects evil ahead, as in *Why*, where his sympathy and understanding for his beloved prompt a thought of what sufferings await her :

Мне грустно, потому что я тебя люблю,
И знаю: молодость цветущую твою
Не попадет молвы коварное гоненье.
За каждый светлый день иль сладкое мгновенье
Слезами и тоской заплатишь ты судьбе.
Мне грустно... потому что весело тебе.

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(I'm sad, for, loving thee, I know full well
That this world's talk, with its calumnious spell,
Will never spare thy fresh youth's opening flower.
For every happy day and sunny hour,
Fate will exact in grief and tears his pay.
I'm sad because I see my loved one gay.)

(J. Pollen)

No one can claim that this was written by a cynical amorist, but it was equally not written by a man who knows the sublime confidence of being in love. Even at this moment Lermontov's insecurity spoils the happy moment. But he found worse obstacles in himself than this. His obsession with the past would at times invade him and prevent him from losing himself in the present. He might believe himself in love with one woman and then, in the very act of embracing her, think of someone else :

Я говорю с подругой юных дней;
В твоих чертах ищу черты другие,
В устах живых — уста давно немые,
В глазах — огонь угаснувших очей.

(I speak to a companion of young days;
In yours, I seek another's face once cherished,
In living lips, lips that have long since perished,
In eyes, a flame that was long since ablaze.)

Lermontov seems to have been possessed by an ideal of a lost love which prevented him from ever falling fully in love again.

No less characteristic are those harsher, more ironical poems in which Lermontov dwells on the faithlessness or cruelty of women. In *The Testament* he dramatises a situation which he may have foreseen as his own. A soldier has been mortally wounded and knows that his death will mean nothing to anyone. He asks a friend not to tell his parents the truth, but to say that his regiment has been sent to the front, and that anyhow he is slow at writing letters. But there is one message which he insists upon sending :

Соседка есть у них одна...
Как вспомнишь, как давно
Расстались!... Обо мне она
Не спросит... всё равно,

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Ты Расскажи всю правду ей,
Пустого сердца не жалея;
Пусть она поплачет...
Ей ничего не значит!

(We had a neighbour, as you know,
And you remember I
And she . . . How very long ago
It is we said good-bye!
She won't ask after me, nor care,
But tell her ev'rything, don't spare
Her empty heart; and let her cry; —
To her it doesn't signify.)

(Maurice Baring)

No less striking is the poem *Dead Man's Love*, in which Lermontov dramatises himself as a corpse who still thinks of his beloved and appeals to her from the grave, saying that, just as he still remembers and loves her, so should she remember and love him. It is, as it were, a counterpart to those lines which Pushkin wrote to Amalia Riznich four years after her death, reminding her of the kiss which she has promised him when they meet again. If Pushkin carries to an unusual limit the notion of a love stronger than death, Lermontov carries it still further, and differs from Pushkin by transposing his passion to an imaginary situation and making it more exotic and more sensational.

If Lermontov's tormenting uncertainties made him take a low view of life, they also made him take a low view of himself. So far from thinking that he was the innocent victim of a wicked world, he had few illusions about himself and believed that he got what he deserved. He dramatised himself as a lost soul, derided by society because of some fault which he had committed. The image or myth which he found for this conviction was a demon, which personified his position. In different short poems and in the various drafts of his long poem, *The Demon*, Lermontov shows how this myth changed under his hands and passed from youthful fancies to a true record of something deep in his nature. In *My Demon*, written in 1829, the Demon is a kind of Byronic hero, whose element is storm and whose character, compounded of melancholy, bad temper, and unbelief, makes him

scorn love, reject prayers, and look with indifference on blood. Two years later some of the more violent traits have disappeared, and the Demon is the poet's other self, almost his familiar spirit, who taunts him with images of perfection and presentiments of bliss to be withdrawn as soon as they are presented. Lermontov at this period hovered between two ideas, the one that he was a demon, elect of evil and proud in temper, an exile from both heaven and earth, and the other that this demon was his other self, who tormented and corrupted him but was in the last resort not his essential nature.

In the last draft of the poem, finished just before his death, Lermontov tells a story which is almost autobiographical in that the Demon is his own soul with its contradictions and paradoxes. The chief character is a fallen angel who loves a mortal woman and tells her who he is :

**Я тот, кого никто не любит,
И все живущее клянет.**

(For I am he whom no one loves,
Whom every human being curses.)

In a declaration of love, in which every word is a flame, he says that he has forsworn his pride and desires to be reconciled with God, to pray, to believe in the good. The woman, Tamara, yields to him and forfeits her life, but her soul is borne by angels to Heaven, because she has redeemed her sin by death, while the Demon is left, as before, in despair. This conclusion does credit to Lermontov's candour. If love were all that is needed for salvation, the Demon, no less than Tamara, should be saved. But he is not, and Lermontov shows his distrust of such romantic notions. His Demon remains as he is, because, in his pride and his passion, he is incapable of sacrifice, and redemption comes not to every kind of love but only to that kind which fulfils itself in sacrifice. The Demon is Lermontov's image of his dissatisfaction and disgust with himself, of his conviction that some final weakness of flesh or character prevents him from making the sacrifice which would deliver him from his worst impulses. His Demon is a new conception of evil. He is no Satan or Mephistopheles, as Milton or Goethe created them. He is

closer to the ordinary human heart with its selfish passions, its uncontrolled appetites, its cowardly refusals, its cold absorption in itself.

In his melancholy and his misgivings Lermontov had one thing to which he could hold — his art. In the last four years of his life he strengthened and enriched it in every poem. He found the Caucasus more inspiring than St. Petersburg with its uneasy pressure of social relations. Like Pushkin, he felt free among the mountains and their primitive inhabitants, savoured with relish the local stories, and enjoyed a solitary communion with the incomparable landscape. He experimented with new metrical effects, as in *Mtsyri*, in which he abandons the Russian fondness for feminine endings and uses masculine endings throughout, thus giving to his verse a hardness of outline not to be found in Pushkin. His imagery, always bold for his time, becomes bolder, as when he compares the Caucasus to a giant leaning on his shield or the rivers Daryal and Terek to lions shaking their manes. In composition Lermontov found the security which was his most urgent need. In it he was in command of himself and at peace with his circumstances. The more final and flawless a poem was, the greater was his triumph over his personal obstacles.

Lermontov's progress in mastering himself went further than this. Though he continued to write about his own problems and conflicts, he moved surely and confidently towards a more objective art. His early poetry is almost entirely about himself, even when it takes the form of drama or narrative, but in his later work he begins to create worlds which live in their own right and need no reference to his feelings or circumstances. In this progress he was helped by his growing command of his art and his increased trust in himself. A good example of it can be seen in his treatment of nature. In his early poetry nature plays very little part, and, when it does, it is as a background or a parallel to his feelings. But in the Caucasus he found a new approach to it and welcomed a companionship which made him forget his troubles in an unalloyed delight. Nature gave him the contrast which he needed to himself, and this explains his unusual treatment

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of it. He was not concerned with the 'pathetic fallacy' which attributes human feelings to natural things ; he did not, like Wordsworth, find among mountains and lakes a philosophy of life; he had nothing in common with his contemporary, Tyutchev, who saw nature rent between light and darkness, between order and chaos ; he lacked Hölderlin's vision of a radiant world still hallowed-by Hellenic gods. For him the claim of nature was precisely that it is not human, that is has nothing in common with man. That was why he was at home with it. Once indeed, after describing a scene of summer, he concludes with something that is almost mystical:

Когда студёный ключ играет по оврагу
И, погружая мысль в какой-то смутный сон,
Шепчет мне таинственную сагу
Про мирный край, откуда мчится он;

Тогда смирятся души моей тревога,
Тогда расходятся морщины на челе,
И счастье я могу постигнуть на земле,
И в небесах я вижу Бога!...

(O when the rill that plays on rocks with spray delirious
And tinges fancy with the touch of misty dreams,
Narrates in whispered tones its tale mysterious
Of peaceful lands, from which in haste it streams ;

Then, when within my soul is calmed the storm resounding,
Then are the wrinkles from my brow repelled and cast,
Then happiness on earth I grasp and know at last,
And see in Heaven God's grace abounding!)

(Sir Cecil Kisch)

Lermontov never goes further than this, but even this shows how careful and rational his treatment of nature is. He is content that it should be itself and so delight his eyes and ears that he asks for nothing else.

From this loving observation Lermontov learned to set the strange events of his narrative in landscapes at once majestic and real. If he shared the taste of his age for stupendous scenery, his vision of it was not half dream like Shelley's or an accumulation of fine details like Keats'. His

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vivid eye saw the whole scene in perspective and marked equally the main design and the significant features. If he allowed a generous measure of such description, he also made it perform an important part in his stories. One of his sublimest passages is in *The Demon*, when the Demon flies down to earth and sees the Caucasus below him, from the snow-clad peak of Kasbek, glittering like a diamond, to the rivers hurtling down rocky gorges. Here Lermontov turns a contrast which he knows in himself to stress the point of his story. The vast detachment of nature emphasises the passions in the Demon and prepares the way to his career among men. So, too, in *Mtsyri*, Lermontov marks the difference between the cloistered life, which his hero has hitherto led, and his sudden liberty by a contrast between the dark woods from which he emerges and the blazing scene which greets him in the heat of day :

Мир Божий спал
В оцепенении глухом
Отчаянья тяжелым сном.
Хотя бы крикнул коростель,
Иль стрекозы живая трель
Послышалась, или ручья
Ребячий лепет... Липь змея,
Сухим бурьяном шелестя,
Сверкая желтою спиной,
Как будто падишью златой
Покрытый донизу клинок,
Браздя рассыпчатый песок,
Скользила бережно; потом,
Играя, нежась на нем,
Тройным свивалась кольцом;
То будто вдурь обожжена,
Металась, прыгала она
И в дальних пряталась кустах...

(And on God's world there lay the deep
And heavy spell of utter sleep,
Although the landrail called, and I
Could hear the quavering dragon-fly
Or else the lispings of the stream . . .
Only a snake with yellow gleam,

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Like golden lettering inlaid
From hilt to tip upon a blade,
Was rustling, for the grass was dry,
And in the loose grass cautiously
He slid, and then began to spring
And roll himself into a ring,
Then, as though struck by sudden fear,
Made haste to dart and disappear.)

(Maurice Baring)

Lermontov makes nature provide an uninterested, splendidly independent antithesis to the strange ways of men and demons. It lives in its own right and gives a new dimension to the actions of which it is the stage.

Just as Lermontov transposed his own delight in nature to objective descriptions of it, so he transposed his taste for action into exciting stories. A life of gallant adventure had been his day-dream since boyhood, and it is not surprising that, when he was under arrest in 1837, he rewrote about himself some earlier lines about an anonymous hero. Even before he found his full powers, Lermontov had attempted with success themes of militant tribesmen and desperate outlaws. But his first triumph in narrative poetry was concerned with his own countrymen. In *Borodino* (1837) he tells the story of the great battle through a soldier who took part in it, and displays a professional pride in a great achievement as well as an experienced knowledge of war. The poem is at once realistic and imaginative, detailed and exciting. It gives the authentic thrill of battle without any false glorification of it. It begins quietly with the preliminaries to the encounter, the occupation of a position suitable for defence, and the long wait before the French attack, when the soldiers sit and mend their coats or spit and clean their bayonets. Then comes the fight:

Ну ж был денёк! Сквозь дым летучий
Французы двинулись как тучи,
И всё на наш редут.
Уланы с пестрыми значками,
Драгуны с конскими хвостами,
Все промелькнули перед нами,
Все побывали тут.

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Вам не видать таких сражений!...
Носились знамена как топи,
В дыму огонь блестел,
Звучал булат, картечь визжала,
Рука бойцов колоть устала,
И ядрам пролетать мешала
Гора кровавых тел.

Изведал враг в тот день немало,
Что значит русский бой удалий,
Наш рукопашный бой!...
Земля тряслась — как наши груди,
Смешались в кучу кони, люди,
И залпы тысячи орудий
Слились в протяжный вой...

(That was a day. Towards our redoubt
We saw the Frenchmen gallop out
Through smoky air,
Dragoons as bright as on parade,
And blue hussars with golden braid,
And Uhlans — what a show they made!
They all were there.

That was a day will never die :
The flags like spirits streaming by —
A fire ahead —
The clash of steel — the cannon's blast —
Our arms too weak to slay at last:
But few the bullets were that passed
Our wall of dead.

That day the foeman learned aright
The way we Russian soldiers fight —
Fierce hand to hand,
Horses and men together laid,
And still the thundering cannonade ;
Our breasts were trembling, as it made
Tremble the land.)

(Frances Cornford)

This is objective narrative in the strictest sense. The old soldier speaks not in Lermontov's voice but his own, and there is nothing of Lermontov's characteristic sentiment in what he says. All that matters is a vivid experience as it

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might appeal to one who took part in it. The dramatisation is complete and masterly.

This art Lermontov exploited both in long and short poems. In the manner of the Russian *byliny* he wrote the *Song of Ivan Vasilevich* in which the old devices of narrative and the traditional metre are given a new brilliance, and an exciting and tragic tale as told without any reference to the poet's own feelings. Many shorter poems show the same art. In *Cossack Cradle Song*, which dwells with a charming grace on the mother who rocks her child in his cradle and looks forward to the time when he will be a great warrior, her characterisation, even in so short a space, is complete and satisfying. In *Quarrel* the speaker is a Caucasian whose beloved has betrayed him, and the theme is the moment at night when he is about to take his revenge. In *Tamara* a witch, living in a castle which is a lifeless ruin by day and a haunt of music by night when it lures travellers to their doom, may have something in common with themes of German romanticism but owes more to Caucasian legends and has their authentic air of a world haunted by mysterious, malignant spirits. In his last years Lermontov perfected his gift for poetical narrative, showing how much can be done with a few words, some significant details, and an unfailing sense of climax. Of the poets of the Romantic period he is almost alone in the remarkable objectivity of his story-telling. Whereas Byron makes his heroes reflections of himself, or Shelley presents metaphysical abstractions in human guise, or Schiller imposes his own speculative ideas on the narrative, Lermontov tells a story for its own sake and makes the most of its possibilities by exploiting its human appeal.

Yet though he found consolation and success in the practice of such an art, Lermontov was still unhappy and troubled. His trouble was not the old Romantic melancholy or the ennui of Baudelaire. It was a pre-eminently personal problem — how could he be himself in the way that he wished when men and circumstances forbade it? The escape into art was indeed something, but it was not everything. He could not accommodate himself to his fellows, was incapable of holding his tongue, and his sharp jokes won him many

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enemies. He was tired of struggling with others and with himself, and inevitably his thoughts turned to some ideal state in which he would be freed from his troubles and yet still in some sense be himself. So in a poem written in the last year of his life he gives a characteristically vivid and concrete form to his desire. As he walks on the road at night, he contrasts the serenity of the skies with his own tormented state, his longing for peace and rest. He longs to sleep and forget, but in his own way and on his own terms :

Но не тем холодным сном могилы...
Я б желал навеки так заснуть,
Чтоб в груди дремали жизни силы,
Чтоб дыша ведалась тихо грудь;

Чтоб всю ночь, весь день мой слух лелея,
Про любовь мне сладкий голос пел,
Надо мной чтоб вечно зеленея
Темный дуб склонялся и шумел.

(No, not in the grave's cold sleep to moulder,
I would lie in everlasting rest,
So but in me living forces smoulder,
So but tranquil breathing stir my breast.

So but, night and daytime, those that love me
Lull my ears with songs to drowse and drowse,
And an oak-tree, ever green, above me
Stoop and make a dusk of murmuring boughs.)

The fancy, which Lermontov so boldly presents, reflects a mood which is not unfamiliar to young genius when it is rent by inner conflicts or finds its load of responsibility too heavy. Nearly a hundred years later the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, himself vexed by many anxieties and tired by creative effort, said something not very different:

Quiero dormir un rato,
Un rato, un minuto, un siglo,
Pero que todas sepan que no he muerto,
Que he un establo de oro en mis labios,
Que soy el pequeño amigo del viento Oeste,
Que soy la sombra inmensa de mis lagrimas.

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(I wish to sleep for a while,
A while, a minute, a century,
But all must know that I am not dead,
That I have a stable of gold on my lips,
That I am the little friend of the West wind,
That I am the immense shadow of my tears.)

Such is the dream which *young* poets invent for themselves when they find the strain of life too great. It shows how they wish to secure the impossible, to maintain their imaginative vision without its cost or its cares.

This is no more than a dream. Such a state is not known to man, and it is useless to wish for it. Lermontov saw this clearly enough and with the logic of despair turned his thoughts to death. He did not desire it, as at times Shelley and Keats did, nor did he ask himself what it meant or try to persuade himself that in it he would at last be himself. He was too hard-headed to indulge in luxurious fancies of annihilation, but none the less the menace of an early death haunted him as the doom to which he was born. In such a spirit he imagines himself lying on the sands of Daghestan with a bullet through his breast, while far away a young woman, who still cares for him, sees him in a vision :

И спилась ей долина Дагестана;
Знакомый труп лежал в долине той;
В его груди дымясь чернела рана,
И кровь лилась хладеющей струей.

(She dreamed she saw a vale of Daghestan . . .
And in that vale a well-known body lay;
Smoke rose from a black wound, and the blood ran
In chilling streams from it, and ebbed away.)

If Lermontov did not actively wish for death, he believed that it would soon come to him. It came soon enough, on 15 July 1841, from Major Martynov's bullet.

Lermontov has a full share of the discontent which we associate with the Romantic age. If in his ordinary life it made him sarcastic and cynical, it touched his poetry in a far more serious and more human way. Behind his self-dramatisation, behind his escapes into nature or his tales of

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stirring action, lay his central belief in certain things of great importance, in the affections, in truth, in courage, in liberty. He saw that what mattered so much to him mattered very little to his contemporaries, and he sought to solve the conflict by despising them, as they despised him. In the end he knew that he had failed, that his glorious message meant nothing to others. In this spirit he wrote his *Prophet*, in which at the close of his life he speaks clearly about himself. In choosing the theme and the title he had no doubt Pushkin's poem of the same title in his mind. But whereas Pushkin speaks of the ineffable splendours of the poetic calling, of the visions and knowledge which it confers, of the Divine force behind it and of the infinite possibilities before, Lermontov speaks of its tragic cost, of the contempt and derision which it earns from other men. His prophet lives in the wilderness and is fed by the birds, but the contrast is absolute between his communion with God and his communion with men:

Завет предвечного храня,
Мне тварь покорна там земная;
И звезды слушают меня,
Лучами радостно играя.

Когда же через шумный град
Я пробираюсь торопливо,
То старцы детям говорят
С улыбкою самолюбивой:

«Смотрите: вот пример для вас!
Он горд был, не ужился с нами:
Глупец, хотел уверить нас,
Что Бог гласит его устами!

Смотрите ж, дети, на него:
Как он угрюм и худ и бледен!
Смотрите, как он наг и беден,
Как презирают все его!»

(Keeping the Eternal's covenant,
All things of earth obey and love me;
Stars to my service ministrant
Sparkle with frolic lamps above me.

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But if with furtive hurrying feet
I slip through town amid the noise,
I see the smile of self-conceit,
And hear the old men tell the boys :
' Look! Here was Pride — be warned and dread it! —
Would none of us to dwell among :
This fool would have his neighbours credit
That God gave utterance to his tongue.
' Look well, you children. There he goes —
Haggard and sour and bad and grim!
Look, he's no money, he's no clothes!
And how they all think scorn of him!')

(J. S. Phillimore)

Lermontov's *Prophet*, like Pushkin's, reflects a lofty conception of the poet's calling, a conception to which men of the Romantic age had been led not merely by their trust in inspiration but by their belief that poetry stands for all that is best in man and is a means to redeem the world. Lermontov did not question this belief, but a hard school taught him that it would be met by misunderstanding and obloquy and that any man who held it must pay for it with his blood.

X

WALTER PATER

PAUL BOURGET once described Walter Pater as 'ami de Circé transformé en dogue'. No doubt he referred to the surprising contrast between Pater's physical appearance and his writings. The man whom many of his juniors regarded with awestruck admiration as a guide into enchanting realms of art and fancy presented to the world the look of a retired major. With his immobile face, his heavy moustache, his quiet, even voice, his unobtrusive and yet somehow embarrassed presence, Pater might easily pass unnoticed in any company where his identity was not known. Even those, like his colleagues at Brasenose College, who saw him daily, seem seldom to have entered into intimacy with him, and his real friends were few. The mask which Pater showed to the world was certainly at variance with the self which men knew from his books. But Bourget's words may perhaps be taken to mark more than this contrast between the mask and the man, to indicate something important in Pater's achievement and way of life. In his passionate love of the arts and his devotion to what he believed to be the Beautiful, Pater was indeed a friend of Circe, a devotee and a victim of magical things, an investigator, not entirely impartial or dispassionate, of strange, alluring regions in the mind. But the adventurous aesthete, the courageous connoisseur of unfamiliar experience, was also a thinker who wished to reduce his sensations to order, to understand and command and control them through central principles, to find through the disparate phenomena of artistic experience a key to many problems which are more usually left to religion or morality or metaphysics. In his determination to shape his life on this pattern Pater showed his bull-dog breed. His task was not easy, and he encountered considerable opposition, as when he awoke the

distrust of his old tutor, Benjamin Jowett, whose worldly clericalism allowed no place to so unorthodox and so individual an outlook, or when he became a target for W. H. Mallock's able and destructive malice in *The New Republic*. Though the years were to tame and soften the Circean element in Pater, it was with him in some degree to the end, but it was always related to something else, a powerful intellect which liked to probe problems until it found answers to them and was never really content to believe that exciting experiences are in themselves enough.

Pater's literary career began in 1866 with the first draft of his essay on Coleridge and ended with his death in 1894. The seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century might on a superficial glance seem to be a strange time for this exotic figure to make so emphatic an appearance and to leave so great a mark on contemporary thought. It was an age of commerce and imperial expansion, of bitter political controversy and raucous religious revivals. It was above all an age of triumphant Philistinism. The decay of public taste, which began when the Prince Consort carried out his project of the Great Exhibition of 1851, had now spread to many departments of life. The painting and the architecture of these years were often as pretentious and trivial as the doctrines of worldly success preached by such prophets as Samuel Smiles. Even English poetry, which can usually be relied upon to redeem the faults of our civilisation, had fallen into a decline. Tennyson and Browning were still active but had little new or important to say ; Arnold wrote less and less poetry, as he devised schemes for education or declaimed against the growing barbarism of the time; Swinburne was soon to exhaust his powers and retire to Putney and a monotonous imitation of his earlier self. There were, it is true, other and more lively spirits abroad. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his sister Christina pursued their own high ideals of artistic accomplishment, but they made no great impression on the public, and the new voices of Thomas Hardy and George Meredith had as yet found few to listen to them. On the whole the arts were suffering from a depression which first anticipated and then matched the agricultural depression

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which cast so long a shadow over the eighties. Despite its self-confidence and its self-righteousness, despite its noble devotions and its admirable seriousness, the Victorian age had lost its great creative impetus and needed new hope and new vigour. For some men Pater, working quietly in Oxford, where he had no great influence, brought a message of revival and almost of salvation.

Of Pater's appeal to the younger generation of this time there is no question. We have only to remember the words which Wilde spoke to W. B. Yeats about Pater's *Renaissance* : 'It is my golden book. I never go anywhere without it'; or Arthur Symonds' account of how as a young man he sent his first work to Pater for criticism, feeling that he alone was worthy of consultation; or the awe-struck reverence with which the two ladies who wrote together under the name of Michael Field listened to the master's lecture on Prosper Mérimée. Nor are more unusual testimonies lacking. When Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig came back in 1919 as the commander-in-chief of a victorious army to his old college of Brasenose, he asked the Principal if his old tutor was still alive, and added that he was a man called Pater. 'I am afraid that he died in 1894,' said the Principal. 'I am sorry to hear that,' replied Haig. 'I modelled my prose-style on his.' In such unexpected tributes we can see the pervasive influence of a great reputation. Pater answered some urgent need in his time. It was he, and not Jowett or Mark Pattison, whom clever young men from London, like Edmund Gosse and William Rothenstein, visited when they came to Oxford ; it was he to whom aspiring writers sent their work for criticism. In a period of doubt and anxiety he seemed to have something to say which was worth hearing, and he said it in a way which appealed to the Victorian love of intricate and laborious craftsmanship.

It is impossible to understand Pater's appeal to his generation without seeing it in its historical context. By the seventies the fabric of Victorian religious belief had been seriously impaired not only by Darwinism with its ghastly account of a universe proceeding by mutual destruction but by the spirit of historical criticism, which was indeed a child

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of rationalism in the eighteenth century but had recently received a new impetus from its parade of scientific method and impersonal detachment. How deeply these influences pierced into Victorian complacency can be seen equally in the cultivated Arnold and the self-taught Hardy. The doubting spirit which Tennyson claimed that he had conquered in himself was shared by thousands to whom his compromise brought little comfort, and many found that they could no longer walk on the old paths or accept the old assumptions. The decay of religion created a vacuum which clamoured to be filled. Some might indeed find a satisfactory substitute in natural science with its confidence that before long it would fathom the mysteries of life and death and uncover the innermost workings of the universe. But even this was after all not everything that men expect from religion, and there were many who wanted something warmer and more intimate, something which awoke awe and mystery, demanded devotion and sacrifice, and gave inspiration and hope and purpose.

This need was matched and completed by another which is not always easily distinguished from it. The sudden and swift advance of industry had changed the face of England, and with the face it had touched the soul. Unrestricted enterprise and a vastly increased production of goods had imposed upon life a new pattern which awoke something akin to dismay in many serious and sensitive men. They looked with horror on the growth of enormous cities, which in their absorption in grim, mechanical purposes almost lacked the light of day. The old ease and grace of life seemed to be passing away under the impact of standardised production and the struggle for wealth. A new class had risen to power which knew little of the traditional culture which had sweetened the domination of the old land-owning aristocracy, and men like Arnold, Carlyle, and Ruskin viewed the dark prospect with indignation and fear. Something was needed to restore values and to counter the gross taste of the new age. This need coincided with the need for some kind of faith, and the result was that some men hoped to find salvation in a religion of beauty. To this they could give

their devotion and their trust, and through this they hoped to counter the barbarisation of their native scenes. Pater's first and most fervent admirers turned to him in the confidence that he would meet their needs by providing a gospel which would at once resist the onslaughts of the scientific spirit and forestall the menaces of a mechanised society.

If this was what his admirers sought in Pater, it was not what he wished to give them. He was too uncertain of his opinions to propound dogmas or formulate creeds. He was in fact a typically English empiricist, who had indeed been touched by the philosophies of Plato and Kant and Hegel, but remained, at heart, of the school of Hume and John Stuart Mill." He more than once protests that there are no absolute certainties, that all we can do is to assess the relative values of things, that though we may savour and enjoy philosophical systems almost as works of art, there is no final truth to be found in them, and we must be content with what we can discover by observation and experiment within a limited field of investigation. When he saw that others regarded him as a guide to life and his personal tastes as the articles of an aesthetic creed, Pater was troubled and distressed. He withdrew the famous 'Postscript' from some editions of his *Renaissance* because he was afraid of its effect on immature minds, and he omitted from the final edition of *Appreciations* the chapter on 'Aesthetic Poetry', in which he had touched, with perhaps too sympathetic an insight, on some of the wilder elements in the work of William Morris. When he found himself treated as their master by Wilde and his friends, he was embarrassed and almost resentful. It was not so much that he was naturally shy and unassertive ; it was rather that he was too honest to claim a position which he knew not to be his or to pretend that his tentative and carefully qualified observations constituted in any way a philosophy or a gospel.

If Pater won his special eminence largely in spite of himself, it was none the less deserved. He represented with an unusual purity and to an unusual degree something which was stirring not only in England but in most European countries. This has been called the Aesthetic Movement, but

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the name is unsatisfactory because the word 'aesthetic' has many meanings and some unflattering associations. This movement, which was quite instinctive and lacked any central direction, was concerned with more than the enjoyment of beautiful things or the search for new sensations ; still less was it a matter of poses and affectations. It was a serious attempt to give a more abundant life to societies which had failed to accommodate themselves to the fierce impacts of the industrial revolution. Its exponents hoped that through the cult of art and beauty the vigour and variety of existence would be restored and even enhanced, and that Europe would again enjoy some of the spiritual splendours which it knew in the Renaissance. What Pater did in England was done in somewhat different ways by Friedrich Nietzsche in Germany and by Stéphane Mallarmé in France. Though Nietzsche hoped that the redemption of his country would come through music and for a time placed his trust in Wagner, and though Mallarmé was no teacher but a poet who gave voice to his own almost mystical search for an Ideal Beauty, both were at one with Pater in their supreme respect for the artistic heritage of the past and their belief that an imaginative vision of life is the most important thing we can have. Despite his doubts and his hesitations Pater never abandoned this belief, and it accounts for the high regard in which his contemporaries held him.

Pater is commonly regarded as a critic. A critic indeed he was, but of an unusual kind. He won his first fame through his study of visual arts and to a lesser degree of literature, and though later he broadened his scope, he remained to the end a critic rather than a creative artist. He lacked the imaginative sweep which fashions new worlds of the spirit, and the sources of his inspiration lay less in the uncharted regions of his own thoughts than in the works of other men. He understood himself well enough to see that his temperament needed nourishment from outside. In this knowledge he cultivated his personal endowment with austere assiduity until his death. He was peculiarly sensitive to certain visible things, to works of art whether in painting or sculpture or words, to exciting and imaginative ideas ; and the effect

which these had on him was the mainspring of his life. A picture or a book would so absorb and dominate him, fill him with such delight and exaltation that he would almost lose his personality in it and feel for the moment that nothing mattered outside it. This is of course a familiar enough experience to many men and women, but Pater enjoyed it to an extraordinary degree. Because it meant so much to him, his range of intense appreciation was not very wide. He was not an omnivorous devourer of sensations ; he did not scour the world for them or pick tit-bits from many times and places. When something caught him, he was its devoted and responsive victim, who sought to extract all that he possibly could from it and was by his very devotion hampered from looking at anything else. Pater practised an instinctive selection in his approach to the arts. If anything mattered at all to him, it mattered a great deal. He gave his whole being to it and did not abandon it until he had unravelled what he believed to be its secret.

What Pater sought in an artist or a writer was '*la vraie vérité*', the essential truth about him. There are of course those who assert that this is impossible and that no single element in a work of art is more important than any other in it. Yet Pater was justified in his view. It is not merely that with most artists and writers we feel that certain works are more truly representative than others ; nor was it this that interested Pater. It is rather that most artists are what they are because of certain essential qualities which they share with no one else in the same degree and which may indeed be their unique possession. Pater was keenly concerned with discovering this uniqueness and felt that in so doing he revealed what was most valuable in a man's work. And if we grant that this is a legitimate task, we can hardly deny his success in it. He had indeed a remarkable gift for discerning the essential qualities of a painter or a poet. Take, for instance, his treatment of Wordsworth. He saw more clearly even than Arnold the singular character of Wordsworth's genius, its dual nature which is expressed partly in a loving and sensitive observation of natural things and partly in a very different mood, when, as Pater says : 'A new bold

thought lifted him above the furrow, above the green turf of the Westmoreland churchyard, to a world altogether different in its vagueness and vastness, and the narrow glen was full of the brooding power of one universal spirit'. That after all is the secret of Wordsworth, and Pater has put his finger on it. Again, when the remains of archaic Greek sculpture began to be known through excavation and to perplex some scholars whose taste had been formed on the art of the fifth and fourth centuries, Pater saw that the familiar standards were irrelevant, and that what might be taken for primitive incompetence was a careful and considered art, which did indeed move within narrow limits, but reflected with complete sincerity the religious convictions of the Greeks and was concerned to make the human form as expressive as possible in itself without reference to literary or other external considerations.

Pater was able to do this because his sensibility was such that he had almost a clairvoyant insight into the minds of those whose works he admired. Sometimes he failed, and his essay on Raphael shows his limitations. But usually he wrote only about those men with whom he had an imaginative affinity or who had so absorbed his attention that he understood them by an effortless sympathy. When he felt this, he would work hard at his subject and try to find what scholarship had to tell him. But more important to him than the accumulated learning of other men was the knowledge which he gained for himself by looking closely at a picture or studying a book with the precise scrutiny of an accomplished craftsman. Though he owed much to other scholars and perhaps more to a few friends who shared his interests, his greatest obligation was to this gift of living with some master's work until he really understood it and was able to distinguish what was essential in it from what was accidental. Take, for instance, his chapter on Prosper Mérimée. Here we might think was an author so profoundly and inescapably French that even Pater, with his love of fine French things, might fail to appreciate his full worth. Yet Pater's chapter is not only the best English comment on Mérimée but equal in worth to some of the best French comments. He under-

stands Mérimée's 'impersonality' which is central both to his style, with its air of detachment and dryness, and to his method of narration, in which, as Pater says, 'there are no half-lights'. Such conclusions sound simple when we hear them, but they are reached only by hard thought and by a special kind of intuition which a man cannot command at will since it comes with almost the waywardness of inspiration.

Pater, however, was not content simply to present 'la vraie vérité' about those whom he studied. He was sufficiently steeped in the historical spirit and sufficiently a philosopher to wish to explain a single case by relating it to general principles of art and human nature. There is hardly an essay in which he does not do something of the kind. His considerable learning and his speculative mind helped him to put forward theories which we can see to have been far ahead of their time and to have anticipated much for which we take credit to ourselves. In an age when Ruskin, despite prodigious knowledge and an extraordinary sensibility, spoiled much of his work by views which soon became antiquated, Pater saw further and kept closer to the permanent elements in imaginative experience. Our own generation, for instance, has heard much about 'pure poetry' and has witnessed many attempts both to define and to write it. We think of this as something very much our own, but a clear enough idea of it can be seen in Pater's article on Joachim du Bellay. He does not indeed use the words 'pure poetry', but he sees that there is a special art of song which catches in its essential purity the mood of some enchanting and fleeting moment: 'A moment — and the thing has vanished, because it was pure effect; but it leaves a relish behind it, a longing that the accident may happen again'. Perhaps little more need be said about 'pure poetry' than that. It is indeed an art of 'pure effect', and it requires no apology. Something of the same prophetic quality may be seen in the famous proposition advanced by Pater in *The School of Giorgione* that 'All art aspires constantly to the condition of music'. Though he was careful to say that each art must work within the limits of its own medium, he saw that the several arts tend to have an 'Andersstreben' and 'to lend each other new forces'. In our own

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time we can witness the truth of Pater's observation. While on the one hand each art has tended to move more strictly within its own limits, so that painting has concentrated on pattern, and sculpture on the relations of bodies, on the other hand each has also striven toward something else, to a purely aesthetic effect which is indeed comparable to music because in it anything representational is left behind and what matters is something almost beyond meaning in any narrow sense of the word.

It is this combination of a remarkable sensibility with a powerful capacity for relating single issues to general problems which makes Pater a great critic. In recent years, when the issues of criticism have been a subject for considerable discussion, he has encountered a certain amount of disapproval. Of course there is room in the world for more than one kind of critic, and in general it seems foolish to lay down rigidly what a critic ought to be. Such tolerance, however, is not common in our time, and because Pater was one kind of critic, he has been blamed for not being another. On one side he has been attacked by those who, following the principles of the eighteenth century, say that a critic's task is to judge and that Pater does not judge, that he does not tell us what is good or bad in a work of art and why it is good or bad. This outlook implies certain assumptions which are not easy to accept, especially that the critic conducts a kind of Last Judgment in which a man's works are examined and either rewarded or condemned according to certain immutable and known laws. In the eighteenth century perhaps such a method was defensible, and Samuel Johnson practised it with sublime confidence. He was fortunate enough to live in an age which had recognised standards and applied them mercilessly. In dealing with a poet's work Johnson sometimes behaved as if he were a schoolmaster correcting some composition by a not too gifted schoolboy. But such a proceeding, even if justifiable, was impossible for Pater. He was too modest and too conscientious to resort to such methods. They were alien to his whole outlook and especially to his belief in the relativity of values and the essentially unique character of every true work of art. It may be desirable

to have fixed standards of good and bad in art, but it is always difficult to secure their acceptance, and as often as not they prevent the critic from seeing what an artist has really done.

A more serious criticism of Pater is that he is too subjective, that he allows his own temperament to dominate his appreciation of other men's work and distorts their image to suit his own tastes. That he is subjective is true enough. He interprets painters and writers as he himself sees them with his peculiar gift for understanding men unlike himself. It may even be true that at times he allows his own predispositions to falsify the subjects of his study. If he does so, it is all in good faith, but it none the less impairs the worth of what he says. For instance, in treating Coleridge Pater perhaps attributes to him too much of that romantic melancholy which he himself undeniably felt: 'More than Childe Harold, more than Werther, more than Rene himself, Coleridge, by what he did, and what he failed to do, represents that inexhaustible discontent, languor, and home-sickness, that endless regret, the chords of which ring all through our modern literature'. Now if we take this as applying to *The Ancient Mariner* or *Kubla Khan* or *Christabel*, it is not relevant or right. It is perhaps applicable to *Dejection*, but, despite its many splendours, *Dejection* is not characteristic of Coleridge's poetry at its most original. But Pater is thinking of Coleridge less as a poet than as a man, and in that he has some support for his views. When he quotes Lamb's famous obituary judgment on Coleridge, 'From his childhood he hungered for eternity', he has solid authority behind him. None the less in any final assessment of Coleridge Pater's judgment is certainly one-sided, and to that degree false. For the poet in Coleridge was an important part, perhaps the most important part, of the man, and the poet, as we know him from his poetry, bears little relation to Pater's picture of the man. The type which he presents has certainly much in common with the Coleridge of the last years, when opium had broken his will, but it is not the man whom Wordsworth knew in the wonderful first years in Somerset. In this case Pater perhaps allowed his personal tastes to distort his judg-

ment. But it should not be counted too seriously against him. It is the inevitable result of the way in which he worked. Because the mainspring of his criticism was his sensibility, it sometimes led him astray and made him see things in wrong proportions and give too much emphasis to one side of a complex subject. It was the price which he paid for his concentration and devotion. In any case it is better to have a sensibility which errs on the side of excess than to be blind to a man's real character.

Pater was in the first place a critic, but he was also more. He had in him a delicate spring of something which can only be called poetry. Though the very few verses which he is known to have written lack life or distinction, there are passages in his prose which are akin to poetry and certainly pass beyond mere criticism. The famous passage on the Mona Lisa in his *Leonardo da Vinci* is a case in point. Indeed W. B. Yeats may well have been right when he saw in this the first example of modern free verse and set it in the forefront of his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. We may none the less ask why Pater in an article abounding in careful observation and precise analysis burst into this rhapsodic melody. The answer can only be that the creative artist who lay hidden in him could not be stifled, and compelled him to speak with his own kind of poetry. The passage of course has won a great renown, and for many it is the only memorable passage which Pater wrote. And yet this is unfair to him. It represents an element in his nature which meant much to him at one time, but he did not repeat the experiment, and the other poetical passages in his critical works are more sober and more closely knitted into his argument. He needed such passages not only to show what the subjects of his study meant to him but to convey in a special evocative way 'la vraie vérité' about them. He saw that mere analysis and mere description were not enough, and that in the last resort he must use an imaginative approach to record what his subjects had really given to him. For instance, the close of his essay on Charles Lamb is almost purely poetical, and that Pater took great pains with it may be seen from a comparison of the final text as it appears in *Appreciations* with the first

printed version in the *Fortnightly Review*.¹ The rhythms have been strengthened and the sentences pared until the whole passage has its own sensitive grace. It is indeed a short prose-poem on certain aspects of London, and it deserves quotation :

Here, the surface of things is certainly humdrum, the streets dingy, the green places, where the child goes a-maying, tame enough. But nowhere are things more apt to respond to the brighter weather, nowhere is there so much difference between rain and sunshine, nowhere do the clouds roll together more grandly; those quaint suburban pastorals gathering a certain quality of grandeur from the background of the great city, with its weighty atmosphere, and portent of storm in the rapid light on dome and bleached stone steeples.

Such no doubt was the poetry which Pater himself found in London, but he found it through Charles Lamb, and it was right that he should put it here in this way.

The poetical interludes in Pater's critical work were at first a foretaste and later a supplement of his more ambitious attempts at creative work. Through his study of the fine art of other men he discovered many interesting things in himself which could not be easily expressed in the narrow scope of a critical essay. He felt the need to express more freely and on a more generous scale the imaginative perceptions and far-ranging thoughts which came to him through his studies, and the result was his novel *Marius the Epicurean* and the short studies contained in *Imaginary Portraits*. That he felt at home with this form of writing is clear from the fact that at his death he left unfinished another novel, *Gaston de Latour*, and that his posthumous *Miscellaneous Studies* contains in *Emerald Uthwart*, *Apollo in Picardy*, and *The Child in the House* three stories which he intended to include in a second series of imaginary portraits. These works, whether long or short, are hard to classify. They are hardly novels or stories, since their incidents are on the whole slight, and

¹ October 1878, p. 474, especially the close: 'nowhere do the clouds roll together more grandly, mounting a little way till the sun touches their dun into gold ; those quaint pastorals gathering a certain quality of grandeur from the background of the great city, visible from those distant fields also, with its weighty atmosphere, and portent of storm, in the rapid light on dome and bleached stone steeples'. I owe this information to Mr. John Sparrow.

their narratives are broken by many passages of reflection. *Marius* is perhaps a philosophical novel in the same sense as *John Inglesant*, but it has less dramatic interest and lives more by the theoretical issues which it raises than by its actual presentation of persons and events. In Pater the creative artist was hampered by the critic and the thinker. His characters and his situations have a static quality, as if they were works of art on which he exercises his imaginative understanding. Even with his own creations he is still a critic who raises many interesting and lively questions and is delightfully aware of charming or significant moments. When he creates his imaginary persons, he projects so much of himself into them that we read of them less for the light which they throw on the past than for what they tell us of Pater himself. This was a new kind of art, and even now it is hard to find any close parallel to it. We must take it as it is and see what Pater made of it.

Perhaps the easiest way to approach this branch of Pater's work is to treat it as a series of imaginative autobiographies, as if he could express certain things in himself only by presenting them in these figures of his fancy. That there is even a literal autobiographical element in them can be seen from *The Child in the House* and *Emerald Uthwart*. In the first, Pater describes something of his own childhood, and the graceful poetry which runs through it comes from his remembrance of things past. He looks back on his childhood with such detachment as he can muster and bathes it in the golden light of affectionate memory. In the second, he describes his own school-days at Canterbury under the shadow of the great cathedral, to which he pays his eloquent tribute:

The long, finely weathered, leaden roof, and the great square tower, gravely magnificent, emphatic from the first view of it over the grey down above the hop-gardens, the gently-watered meadows, dwarf now everything beside; have the bigness of nature's work, seated up there so steadily amid the winds, as rain and fog and heat pass by.

As the story develops, it passes far from Pater's own cloistered existence, but we none the less feel that it is some characterisa-

tion of himself, a projection of old fears and fancies into a half-dramatic form. Pater may well have wished to be like Emerald Uthwart in some respects, and may even have put into him some of his darker apprehensions. Unable to create fully independent and objective worlds, he used his resources to expand his personality into scenes and activities which he had not actually known but which helped him to realise imaginatively certain unfulfilled elements in himself.

Both *Marius* and the *Imaginary Portraits* tell us much about Pater, and it is significant that through them run certain ideas which make a recurring pattern. All are concerned with sensitive and gifted young men who are faced with difficult decisions about the conduct of life and are in some kind of conflict with their times. Marius, in Italy at the time of Marcus Aurelius, has been brought up in a decorous, traditional religion of local sanctities and ceremonies, but it has ceased to meet his intellectual or spiritual needs and he passes by a natural process into a refined Epicureanism: 'Not pleasure, but fulness of life, and "insight" as conducting to that fulness, — energy, variety, and choice of experience, including noble pain and sorrow even'. But Marius finds that this is not all that he needs, and he is not happy in it. He looks for an alternative. The Stoicism which he sees embodied in the Emperor Marcus Aurelius leaves him cold, since it lacks humanity; and gradually he is drawn toward Christianity. Though the book ends without his actually becoming a Christian, we are led to think that he would have done so if he had lived. *Marius* is a historical novel written by a man who studied ancient Rome with a scholarly care and understood many of the cross-currents in its spiritual depths. Indeed it is surprising how well Pater succeeds in evoking some appearances of this lost world and even in creating a living figure of the Emperor. But *Marius* is also a document about Pater. In Marius' search for spiritual certainty we can see Pater's own efforts to find some final system of thought. He too knew the value of traditional sanctities; he too had passed through a refined Epicureanism, and perhaps he too found some kind of rest in Christianity. Of this, however, we cannot be sure. He liked the outward forms of religion

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and had friends among priests of the Anglican Church. At Brasenose he was a keen, if unsuccessful, advocate of compulsory chapel for undergraduates and was himself a regular attendant at the statutory services. But we may doubt if he ever accepted Christianity with his whole heart. He seems to have been an unbeliever despite himself and never to have been able to make a complete act of faith. It is significant that, when Marius is on the verge of conversion, it is not the charity or the mystery of the Christian religion which attracts him but its ritual. To this Pater was certainly drawn, and in this respect his hero reflects him. In showing the inner struggles of Marius Pater clarifies his own conflicts by setting them in a new perspective.

The four studies of *Imaginary Portraits* are all concerned with characters who are in conflict with their circumstances because they are in some sense ahead of their time. In *A Prince of Court Painters* Watteau suffers from feeling that he is not at home in his environment and finds his powers hampered by it. Denys l'Auxerrois is an embodiment of a wild, Greek, Dionysiac spirit who breaks into the alien civilisation of the Middle Ages and leaves a trail of blood. Sebastian van Storck fights to keep himself free from human ties and, rather than commit himself to marriage, retires to the solitary wastes of the Zuyder Zee, where death takes him as he saves a child's life. Duke Carl of Rosenmold hopes to lead Germany to a new Renaissance, but, despite all his enthusiasm, lacks the worldly wisdom necessary to impress his brutish contemporaries. A similar pattern can be seen in *Emerald Uthwart*. The hero, who seems to be a perfect product of the English public school, lacks the courage which his profession demands and is shot for cowardice in war. Pater's imaginary heroes are in conflict with their circumstances because they possess some special insight or capacity or sensibility which unfits them for entering fully into the life to which they are born, and in the end destroys them. In these different conflicts we can see how Pater transforms his own conflict with his time. He began as a lover of unusual experiences, and though he tried to discipline himself, to conform and to obey, he never quite succeeded.

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The forces of convention frightened and impressed him, and though he made some compromise with them, at least to outward view, yet in his heart he felt the old call of the strange and the wild and embodied it in his imaginary heroes.

It is significant that Pater's heroes come to early and often tragic deaths, and four at least suffer from physical maladies. In Pater's concern with death, and particularly in his almost morbid account of Emerald Uthwart's funeral, there is undeniably something peculiar which must have risen from some twilit corner of his unconscious self. Perhaps it is unfair to tax Pater with doing what after all both Tennyson and Dickens did with a far more luscious indulgence in tears. But somehow we do not expect him to be Victorian in this way. Nor indeed is his strange interest in death the same as that of Tennyson or Dickens. With them it comes from an excess of sentiment, an inability to distinguish what is false in emotion from what is real. Pater saw this distinction well enough, and his morbidity is an anticipation of that drive toward self-destruction which made Wilde court his doom and hurried Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson to early deaths. The prosperous Victorian age seems to have felt that it must make blood-sacrifices to a destiny which had treated it too kindly; and, as it drew to its close, its poets believed that they were a race of doomed beings; that, like Baudelaire and their French forerunners, they were *poètes maudits*, abandoned alike by God and man, and fit only for early death. Pater foresaw this doom because in some ways his case was not very different from that of his disciples. He felt that the ideals for which he lived and worked were disapproved by the majority of society and that in the end a heavy price must be paid for them. He was highly sensitive and, though he made little outward show, he felt keenly such disapproving affronts as he received in Oxford when Jowett prevented him from becoming a proctor, or when he was not invited to the unveiling of the Shelley Memorial, because presumably he was thought not quite respectable. He brooded over these little insults and, by transposing their issues to other spheres, made them more vivid and significant. In a sense his imaginary portraits were his retaliation on a

society which misunderstood and misjudged him. Through them he showed how strange are the workings of the creative mind and what a price it may be forced to pay.

There is something deeper than this in Pater's tragic sense of life. He felt that the artist is somehow a diseased creature, that his unusual sensibility thrives at the expense of more healthy elements in his nature. In himself he fought against this, and his romantic account of Spartan education in *Plato and Platonism* shows how far he was prepared to go in trying to see the best in what was in fact a Philistine outlook. But he never quite eliminated this conviction from himself. With reference to the Mona Lisa, he speaks of 'this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed'. He thought that the kind of beauty which he sought could be created only by those who had some sickness of the soul. He was not entirely wrong. In modern times we have seen notable cases of men who have indeed achieved astonishing artistic success almost because there was something wrong with them. Both Dostoevski and Proust were the victims of physical and mental ailments, and both turned them into great art. Of course, as Pater knew, this is not true of the best Greek writers, and he looked back to them with regret. But in his own time he saw that the artist's task had become much more difficult, that a man might become an artist because he saw further and more clearly than his contemporaries and that a consciousness of this would inevitably wound and harm him. In the Victorian age the artist was torn between fatal alternatives. He could pursue his art as he knew that he ought to pursue it, and in that case he might well ruin his life, as to some degree Rossetti did ; or he could compromise with the public and spoil much that was best in his art, as at times Tennyson did. Pater felt that the first alternative was right, but he knew what the cost might be.

Pater's importance in the Victorian age is that he made a courageous attempt to estimate the place of art in life and of the artist in society. Though his conclusions were tentative, their general outline is clear enough. He was in the first place an apostle of beauty, and tried to make his own work as good as he could make it. He gave to prose —'that other

beauty of prose', as he called it — the devoted attention which some poets give to poetry. His ideal of it he expressed in his essay on 'Style', and we can see how much it meant to him and what pains he took with it. Like Flaubert, whom he quotes with admiration, he felt that only the best possible was good enough. He was a slow worker, and the manuscript of the later chapters of *Gaston de Latour* reveals his meticulous industry. He wrote in a copy-book, using only the alternate lines, making copious corrections and leaving many gaps to be filled later by the right, the flawless word. Such a method of composition does not make him easy or fluent. He charges his sentences with meaning, loads them with qualifications, and spares nothing to make his words say exactly what he means. He was in the first place a deliberate and precise writer, whose complex thoughts must be set down correctly. But he was in the second place an artist with a remarkably rhythmical sense of words. Indeed his rhythm is often so powerful that it exerts on the reader an almost hypnotic influence which obstructs him in grasping the well-knit argument. Such a style is not to the taste of an age which values sharp, immediate effects. It reflects a more leisurely and more conscientious approach to words and preserves relics of the Latin elaboration which inspired some of the noblest monuments of English prose. Just because it is so carefully meditated, it has reserves of strength which become apparent on a second or third reading and may preserve it from the ravages of time when more jaunty styles are forgotten.

In his concentration on art Pater might seem to have neglected other important things and not to have realised that art is part of life and cannot be isolated from it. His more rabid disciples certainly interpreted him in this sense, and the result was the doctrine of the nineties, as Wilde propounded it, that art has nothing to do with life. The dangers of this view are obvious enough. It means in the end that art suffers from lack of contact with the living scene and that the artist becomes an irresponsible anarchist with no social obligations. This interpretation of Pater's view is of course derived from the 'Postscript' of his *Renaissance*. When he says that 'not the fruit of experience, but experience itself,

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is the end' or urges that what matters is 'a quickened, multiplied consciousness', he lays himself open to misunderstanding. It is easy to take these words and to use them in support of the view that nothing matters but the enjoyment of vivid and even violent sensations. But Pater did not mean this. Without troubling to argue the point, he assumed that such art as concerned him was noble and ennobling. Living, as he did, with great masterpieces and being, as he was, remarkably unworldly, he did not foresee what lesser men might make of his most sacred beliefs. He was trying to explain to his generation the enhancement which art can bring to life, and he spoke with passionate conviction. He did not in the least deride morality or claim that art has nothing to do with it; he merely asserted that art has its special glories and its special rewards. In trying to show what these are he stated his case as he himself saw it, and did not trouble to make such qualifications as might have saved him from misinterpretation.

As he developed his ideas and drew further conclusions through new discoveries, Pater elaborated the implications of his earlier doctrine. -Since art is an enhancement of life, it must draw its strength from life, and the difference between great art and merely good art lies in the difference of quality in their matter : 'It is on the quality of the matter it informs or controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends'. This is no narrow view of 'art for art's sake', no denial of the living scene. Pater insists that what makes great art is the value of its human material. Nor is he content with this. He insists that art is much more than enjoyable for its own sake, that it contributes to the fullness of life in a wide and generous sense, and that its greatness is largely dependent on what it does in this respect:

If it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truths about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will also be great art.

In this succinct paragraph Pater summarises most of the qualities of great literature, and there is hardly a masterpiece which cannot be related to what he says. This is his considered conclusion on the nature and function of art, and it has no connection with a self-centred and sterile aestheticism.

The literary and artistic criticism of the Victorian age suffered from making too sharp a distinction between beauty and goodness. This was perhaps inevitable in an age which tended to reduce goodness to the observance of a narrow code of rules and to confine beauty to a limited category of accepted subjects. A mechanical system of this kind could not but obscure the essentially dynamic nature both of goodness and of beauty, and produce even in the most sensitive critics something akin to a split personality when their moral notions were in conflict with their aesthetic impressions. For instance, when Ruskin tried to interpret the art of the Italian Renaissance through his own Protestant morality, he was often forced into sophistry or casuistry in his efforts to make his ethical views agree with his instinctive tastes. Even Arnold, who deplored narrow judgments, was himself the victim of them when he derided Shelley for his ineffectiveness, not seeing that in this he judged a great poet as if he were a politician or a social worker. Though the Victorians showed an admirable seriousness in their search for beauty, they were hampered by their inability to fit it into their highly departmentalised scheme of values. Pater corrected this uneasy balance. He saw that great art passes beyond mere morality because it contributes to goodness, to that greater fullness of life which depends not on rigid rules but on a real insight into the unchanging values of things. What he sought was the Greek ideal of *εὐδαιμονία*, that full well-being in which our finest faculties are at work in the finest way and an enhanced awareness of the richness of life exalts and ennobles us. The elaboration of this thesis and the proof of its validity through individual cases was the task to which Pater set himself in his love of beautiful things.

XI

THE LYRICAL POETRY OF THOMAS HARDY¹

WHEN in 1895 Thomas Hardy published his last serious novel, *Jude the Obscure*, he is said to have been so distressed by the misrepresentation and abuse which greeted it that he turned to writing poetry instead of prose. In the next thirty-three years, until his death at the age of eighty-seven in 1928, Hardy published not only his epic-drama *The Dynasts* but eight volumes of lyrical verse. He began to be known as a poet at an age when most poets find inspiration faint and fitful, and he pursued his task with unremitting vigour into extreme old age. His career falls so decisively into two halves that we cannot treat his verse as a by-product of his novels or his last years as a time when he sought refuge from the brutal stupidity of critics in an art which was beyond their range. To-day Hardy is honoured equally as a novelist and a poet. We may prefer his poems or his novels, but each class stands on its own as a triumphant achievement of creative genius. To have written both is unique. No English, and hardly any European, novelist of Hardy's stature equals him as a poet. Perhaps Meredith might be cited as a rival, but however highly some may prize Meredith's novels, his poetry lacks Hardy's abundance and scope. If Emily Bronte had lived, she might have written poetry comparable in intensity with *Wuthering Heights* — but that is only a speculation with the might-have-been. Hardy's two-fold performance is unique. At his best the most powerful of the later Victorian novelists, he is the most representative British poet between Tennyson and Yeats. Born twenty-one years after the one and twenty-five years before the other, he

¹ Byron Lecture delivered at Nottingham University on 9 November 1946.

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speaks for the generation which reached manhood in the sixties, when industrialism was destroying the old structure of society and Darwinism its system of beliefs.

Hardy's poetry is no mere appendage to his novels, but is closely related to them in a special way; or rather, they are closely related to it. Hardy began by being a poet. His first-known poem, *Domiridium*, a meditative piece in the manner of Wordsworth, was written before 1860. Before he published *Desperate Remedies* in 1877, he wrote a number of verses which did not see the light till thirty or forty years after their first rejection by London editors. Even when he was at work on his great novels, he never quite abandoned poetry, but composed from time to time pieces which he put aside and published many years later. The truth is that Hardy was always a poet, and, when he was not writing verse, he put his poetry into his novels and gave them a special distinction through it. Like Emily Bronte, he wrote novels because they were the best means of expression available to a writer who felt the poetry of action in a contemporary world. In an earlier age he might have written narrative-poetry, but the conventions of Victorian narrative-poetry were too narrow and too stiff for his peculiar gifts. He put his poetry into his novels, until the time came when even that did not satisfy him and he obeyed the call to be a poet and nothing else. The storm over *Jude the Obscure* was certainly the occasion for the change and may well have accelerated it, but sooner or later Hardy would have returned to poetry. It was his first love and his final means of saying certain things that he had to say.

Yet the mere and obvious fact that Hardy's novels and poems come from the same source and aim at very similar ends makes his poetry all the more remarkable. In his novels Hardy belongs to a good English tradition. In his complicated plots, his ingenious exploitation of the love-interest, his contrasts of characters, his interplay of comedy and tragedy, his feeling for the countryside, his sense of period and of place, he has his precedents and parallels in other writers. He does much that other novelists cannot do, but his kind of writing belongs to many. He was a Victorian novelist, who wrote in the Victorian way, though he happened to be a

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master of it. But as a poet he is a singular figure. The poets whom he most loved, Scott, Shelley, Keats, and Swinburne, left no trace on his work. Even Crabbe, whom he greatly admired, belongs to a different world and shows no points of resemblance to what is most characteristic in Hardy. It is usual to say that he owed something to the Dorset poet William Barnes. Hardy knew and loved Barnes and honoured him as a master in the use of words, but while Barnes' best poems were written in dialect, Hardy never touched dialect after one or two early pieces like *Valenciennes* and *The Bride Night Fire*. And though it is possible that Hardy acquired his interest in ingenious metres from Barnes, he was never a metrist in the sense that Barnes was. For Barnes was an accomplished scholar, who adapted the measures of Persian and Welsh poetry to the Dorset dialect and succeeded because he was a most deliberate and delicate craftsman. Hardy profited by some of his experiments and had a natural love for new effects in rhyme and rhythm, but sought them not as a scholar but as a poet who enjoyed any means which helped him to express himself in an unusual and striking way.

Hardy's origins did much to determine his work and outlook. He was the son of a country builder. Though he was legitimately proud of his ancestors, he was much closer to the soil and to its workers than any other English poet of his century. Indeed, though he was not a true peasant like Burns, he was nearer to the peasantry than any English poet since Langland. His knowledge of the country is exact and detailed, with the special experience that comes from living in close contact with the earth. He is too familiar with nature to cherish any Wordsworthian ideals about it. Most of his long life was spent in Dorset, and he knew it with a special, specialist intimacy. He was in touch with men and women who were bred in the English countryside before the building of railways, and through them he absorbed the rich, traditional life of Wessex before education and communications had spoiled its individuality. Hardy is a true countryman not only in his knowledge but in his tastes. Like other countrymen, he likes the sensational and the peculiar. He

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has a Gothic taste for ghosts, for crime, for stories which combine the violent with the grotesque. But he was a countryman who came from a good stock and went to a good school. At home he read the Bible and Shakespeare; at school he learned Latin, and later, like his own Jude, taught himself Greek. He loved history and conducted considerable researches into it. So the situation arose that Hardy, who was in many ways a true son of the soil and shared the interests of farmers and labourers, was also able through his education to see much more than they could and to express himself on matters on which they would be dumb. He was sufficiently above and outside his circumstances to have an artist's detachment from them and to make the most of them in his art.

Hardy seems to have known almost from the start what kind of poetry he was fitted to write. There is little evidence that he experimented with styles or that he copied the manners of other recognised writers. The Wordsworthian air of *Domicilium* has disappeared from the poems which he wrote in the sixties, and such a piece as *Postponement*, composed in 1866, shows no indebtedness to any predecessor but much that was to be characteristic of Hardy's mature style forty years later:

Snow-bound in woodland, a mournful word,
Dropt now and then from the bill of a bird,
Reached me on wind-wafts ; and this I heard,
Wearily waiting:—

'I planned her a nest in a leafless tree,
But the passers eyed and twitted me,
And said : "How reckless a bird is he,
Cheerily mating!"

'Fear-filled, I stayed me till summer-tide,
In lewth of leaves to throne her bride ;
But alas! her love for me waned and died,
Wearily waiting.

'Ah, had I been like some I see,
Born to an evergreen nesting-tree,
None had eyed and twitted me,
Cheerily mating!'

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The main features of Hardy's familiar full manner are nearly all here, the ironical sense of the frustrated situation, the respect for humble creatures as if they had the feelings and the dignity of human beings, the lilting rhythm with its ingenious repetitions and interlocking rhymes, the genuine pathos which lurks behind the apparently careless exterior, the unusual vocabulary with its hints of elements both literary and rustic. This poem was written within a few years of *Goblin Market*, *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Modern Love*, and *Enoch Arden*, but it has no affinity with any of them. It belongs to another world and speaks in a different tongue. This gap between Hardy and other poets was to last through his life. He went his own way, respecting the performances of others but never in the least influenced by them or eager to compete with them.

From such beginnings Hardy passed, with long hesitations and delays but without any obvious break or change, to the great poetry of his last thirty years. The language of this poetry is undeniably unusual. It bears no relation to the sensitive and refined manner of the great Victorians, and has not even any connection with Browning. Hardy's vocabulary in poetry presents a mixture like that of his vocabulary in prose. Just as his novels combine a sublime simplicity, which seems to be born from his native soil, with a complicated literary manner which aims at a rhetorical rotundity, so his verse combines natural ease with studied elaboration. But in his poetry Hardy's elaboration is more deliberate and more conscious than in his novels. Fundamentally he seems to have been eager to avoid that over-simplification which was so marked a characteristic of Tennyson and his imitators. He knew that there are times when a poet must indeed be simple, and at such times he rose nobly to the call. But at other times he felt a need to elaborate, to present something familiar in a special light, to avoid equally the flatness of common speech and the high manner of grand poetry. Then he supplements a body of simple, spoken English with resonant and unusual words of Latin origin and with Anglo-Saxon words which have passed out of currency and have an archaic air. The first class, which includes 'fulgid', 'subtrude', 'interlune', 'flexure', 'frustrance', and 'lucency', is

used to put the subject at some distance and enable us to see it in a new light. The second class, which includes 'thrid', 'scrabble', 'prink', 'wanze', 'fresh' as a verb, and 'vamp' in the sense of 'walk', achieves the opposite effect of making the theme close and familiar. Nor did Hardy limit his enterprise to these two classes of words. He coined compound adjectives with the confidence of a Greek or an Elizabethan ; he formed new abstract nouns from Latin or English roots ; he enjoyed periphrasis and long words used half-humorously to secure surprise. He was not an uncritical stylist who put down the first words that came into his head. He was in his own way a conscious artist, who adapted his vocabulary to his situations and often revised his first texts if he thought that they did not reach the right result. Hardy's style is always original, always his own, and though it is often surprising and sometimes even comic, it secures its special ends in a way that no other style could.

Hardy differed from the great Victorians other than Browning in not wishing to write poetry like that of Keats. For Tennyson, for Rossetti, and even for Arnold Keats had set a standard of how poetry should be written, and in their different ways they all tried to live up to it. What counted with them was the heavily loaded verse, where each word does its full work and contributes to a musical harmony. Theirs is a poetry of keen visual sensibility and emotional richness. Hardy aims at something quite different. His poetry is that of the dramatic situation. This is what he tries to catch and perpetuate in the depth and width of its human appeal. Many of his poems deal with subjects which would be interesting even in a newspaper, and when Hardy transformed them into poetry, he tried to keep their reality, their varied character, their contact with common life. Such subjects and such an aim demanded a treatment quite different from that of Keats and his admirers. The poetry lay in the situations, and the poet must not omit those elements of the grotesque and the horrible which many such situations contain but which lie beyond the reach of a vocabulary concerned only with the strictly beautiful. Hardy's style is necessary to him because it reflects his realism, his interest in what

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really happens, his awareness of the odd and unexpected elements in almost every human crisis. With such an aim Hardy wrote in his own unique way and adapted his manner to the various lights and shades of his dramatic themes.

Hardy's control of this curiously assorted vocabulary may be seen from the poem which he wrote in 1913 on the loss of the *Titanic* and characteristically called *The Convergence of the Twain*. He begins with a tragic, disturbing, highly imaginative vision of the great ship as it lies in the depths of the Atlantic, and in this he subtly distinguishes by his language two elements in the situation, the grand and the humble. Two verses illustrate his art :

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

The contrast is between the proud hopes of those who built the great ship or travelled in it and the cold lifelessness of its present state. He uses his Latin words, 'salamandrine' and 'opulent' to stress the first side of the contrast. Each has a touch of irony. The engines which seemed to flourish like salamanders in the flame are quenched for ever ; the mirrors on which the sea-worm now crawls were meant for people whom wealth seemed to protect from any stroke of doom. Against these words of pride, turned with irony to express the huge degree of the catastrophe, Hardy sets his humble words like 'thrid', and 'slimed', of which the first conveys the inhuman, relentless movement of the water, and the second the absolute difference of the *Titanic's* present inmates from those for whom it was built. Then later in the poem, when he has built up this scene, he turns to his central paradox, the wonderful conception that the iceberg and the ship have grown and developed separately until they meet in the appalling moment of disaster. For this he uses the simplest of words and goes at once to the very heart of his vision:

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And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

The different elements in Hardy's language converge on a single point and contribute to a single, final effect. If he was not always so successful as this, it was no doubt because he sometimes experimented with words and was not quite certain what impression they would make. But in the main the choice of words from different sources and their use in bold combinations is the secret of an essentially dramatic poetry, which sees a subject from different angles and assesses its elements at more than one worth.

Hardy found subjects for poetry everywhere, in his own life, in the lives of others, in history, in nature, in legend. To each he brought the same penetrating eye for the dramatic situation, for the crucial moment when some conjunction of persons or circumstances produces a conflict and a crisis. In his choice of subjects he was guided by his own nature and his own tastes. He is often called gloomy and pessimistic, and it is true that at some times and in some ways he is the most tragic English poet since Shakespeare. But his poetry is by no means universally gloomy, and pessimism is not the clue to its real character. Hardy was no Palladas or Leopardi or James Thomson. He did not always or even usually feel that life is an unmixed evil or that it is better not to be born. His poetry was born of a more complex and more interesting state of mind. At some time he seems to have suffered a terrible shock or disappointment which left an enduring scar. Before this he was relatively self-contained and confident; after it he believed that he had lost something for ever. This crisis was not the terrible state of agony into which he was plunged when he discovered that there was madness in his first wife's family and that she herself was liable to fits of it. Of this he has left traces in such poems as *The Interloper*, *At the Piano*, and *The Wound*.¹ Before he passed through

¹ Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy*, pp. 271 ff., discusses the whole question with great care and thinks that Mrs. Hardy's delusions may have begun 'as long ago as 1896 when two of the *In Tenebris* poems were written'. This effectively disposes of any suspicion that Hardy's crisis in the seventies was due to his wife's malady.

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this searing experience Hardy had already lost his first ebullience and gaiety. This earlier crisis may well have lasted for some time and may even have been precipitated by no very obvious cause. But that it took place we cannot doubt, and it is of the greatest importance to any study of his work.

Two poems tell us as much as we are likely to know about it. *In the Seventies* gives one side of the picture ; it recalls from a later date the unbroken harmony which was once his but which, by implication, he has lost, since he speaks in the past tense of something which he no longer enjoys :

In the seventies I was bearing in my breast,
 Penned tight,
Certain starry thoughts that threw a magic light
On the worktimes and the soundless hours of rest
In the seventies ; aye, I bore them in my breast
 Penned tight.

In the seventies, when my neighbours — even my friend —
 Saw me pass,
Heads were shaken, and I heard the words 'Alas,
For his onward years and name unless he mend!'
In the seventies, when my neighbours and my friend
 Saw me pass.

In the seventies those who met me did not know
 Of the vision
That immuned me from the chillings of misprision
And the damps that choked my goings to and fro
In the seventies ; yea, those noddors did not know
 Of the vision.

In the seventies nought could darken or destroy it,
 Locked in me,
Though as delicate as lamp-worm's lucency;
Neither mist nor murk could weaken or alloy it
In the seventies! could not darken or destroy it,
 Locked in me.

This recalls a real state of mind, when Hardy, in the first years of his creative energy, had some special, inner strength to sustain and guide him. It is the period of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and we can understand that at this time

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Hardy was different from what he was twenty years later. He does not analyse his 'certain starry thoughts', but he shows what they did for him.

This happy period came to an end. Against *In the Seventies* we may set *He fears his Good Fortune*, and the chapter of spiritual history is as complete as we can hope for in a writer so shy and reticent as Hardy. Both poems were written late in life and published in 1917, when he could look back with a certain degree of detachment over the intervening years, but their intensity shows how strongly he felt, even in retrospect, what had happened. The second poem is a counterpart to the first:

There was a glorious time
At an epoch of my prime ;
Mornings beryl-bespread,
And evenings golden-red;
Nothing gray:
And in my heart I said,
' However this chanced to be,
It is too full for me,
Too rare, too rapturous, rash,
Its spell must close with a crash
Some day! '

The radiance went on
Anon and yet anon,
And sweetness fell around
Like manna on the ground.
'I've no claim'
Said I, 'to be thus crowned:
I am not worthy this :—
Must it not go amiss ?—
Well ... let the end foreseen
Come duly!—I am serene.'
—And it came.

At some time in his life, probably when he was in his thirties, Hardy passed through a crisis and felt that in it he had lost past recall something which had hitherto irradiated and braced his whole being. This was not simply the crisis, known to many writers, in which their powers to create become slower and more uncertain ; nor was it an intellectual

crisis in his beliefs. It was a decay or collapse of confidence and harmony in himself, the loss of an inner contentment which had inspired his early work and carried him through doubt and opposition. To it we may attribute something that was henceforward to mark a great deal of what Hardy wrote.

Hardy had a simple character, capable of happiness, and much of his poetry shows his delight in ordinary things. No one has written with more charm about old-fashioned dances or church-music or the weather or first love. He was quite sincere when he wrote with happy reminiscence of what he had enjoyed :

Will these be always great things,
Great things to me ? ...
Let it befall that One will call,
* Soul, I have need of thee':
What then ? Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,
Love, and its ecstasy,
Will always have been great things,
Great things to me!

But though such simple and natural pleasures were what Hardy liked and sought, and though he often praised them, he was drawn irresistibly to other, more troubling subjects. His visual sensibility was more than matched by his sensibility of heart. He was uncommonly tender and compassionate. Sights which would leave other men cold struck him in the core of his being and remained painfully in his memory. This experience was disturbing and distressing. Hardy felt the horror and the shame of many unsuspected flaws in the scheme of things ; he suffered acutely with the sufferings of other living beings, whether human or animal. And this sensitiveness increased with the years. In his novels the gaiety of *Under the Greenwood Tree* yields gradually to a more sombre, more brooding, more wounded spirit, as Hardy moves to the grim horrors of *Jude the Obscure*, and it is perhaps not fanciful to connect this process with what he says in *In the Seventies* and *He fears his Good Fortune*. When some inner light and confidence failed him, he became more and more vulnerable to the blows which events inflicted on

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his tender heart. His escape was to transform these into art. His poetry owes much to this release. Through it Hardy displays a wide range of irony, which is his response to the contrasts and contradictions which distressed him in human life, and especially to the ugly gaps which he found between men's thoughts or desires and the brutal actual facts. Again and again in different forms Hardy builds a poem on such contrasts. They may be very simple as between two kinds of weather, or they may have a tragic majesty, like that between the *Titanic* as her builders fashioned her and as she lies in the Atlantic. This far-reaching irony was Hardy's protection against the many painful experiences which burst in on him and tore his heart. He needed it to save him from his own extreme sensitiveness ; and because it played a central part in his response to life, it became the mainspring of his art, guided him in the choice of his subjects and situations, and gave a special unity and character to the whole body of his poetry.

This irony took different forms. Not all the discords of life are equally serious, and Hardy, with his generous nature and wide understanding, was capable of more than one kind of response. He had in him a strain of whimsical fancy, an elfin, mischievous quality, which seems to belong to the English countryside with its love of ghosts and goblins and its delight in making the flesh creep. Hardy shared these tastes, but exploited them only when his subject was not of the first seriousness. For instance, most of us know the sense of anticlimax, of not being welcome, when we revisit some place familiar in childhood. It is easy to be sentimental about this, but Hardy treats such an occasion with an adventurous irony. In *He Revisits his First School* he indulges in an amusing fancy, which is none the less perfectly true to his feelings :

I should not have shown in the flesh,
I ought to have gone as a ghost;
It was awkward, unseemly almost,
Standing solidly there as when fresh,
 Pale, tiny, crisp-curled,
 My pinions yet furled
 From the winds of the world.

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After waiting so many a year
To wait longer, and go as a sprite
From the tomb at the mid of some night
Was the right, radiant way to appear;
 Not as one wanzing weak
 From life's roar and reek,
 His rest still to seek :

Yea, beglimpsed through the quaint quarried glass
Of green moonlight, by me greener made,
When they'd cry, perhaps, 'There sits his shade
In the olden haunt —just as he was
 When in Walkingame he
 Conned the grand Rule-of-Three
 With the bent of a bee.'

But to show in the afternoon sun,
With an aspect of hollow-eyed care,
When none wished to see me come there,
Was a garish thing, better undone.
 Yes ; wrong was the way;
 But yet, let me say,
 I may right it, some day.

The situation, with its play between fact and fancy, is presented with playful malice, and Hardy, by his gay handling of a spectral visitation, conveys with perfect aptness his disappointment after an unsuccessful outing.

This poem, which by no means stands alone, reflects Hardy's lighter reactions to the imperfections of life. But he could not treat everything so gaily. When he was really distressed, he needed some more powerful means to free him from the burden of an intolerable situation. Like most tender-hearted men, he was sometimes so shocked and affronted by what he saw that his only escape was to be hardly less brutal and callous in his treatment of it. Hardy's elfin impishness passed easily into a harsher strain of mockery, which enabled him to dissect with unrelenting skill pretentiousness or humbug and to present it not with compassion but with ironical derision. The Spirit Ironie, to whom he gave a leading part in *The Dynasts*, was something that he knew in himself and treated with respect because it makes

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sense of what is intolerable nonsense if treated with reason or charity. When this spirit was active in him, Hardy's lyrical fancy was kept in strict abeyance, and a sharp realism dominated his work. It was his weapon particularly when he was shocked by the kind of imposture which cannot be dismissed with laughter because it involves too serious issues and may even break hearts. Then Hardy adopts a ruthless, satirical realism, as in the poem *In Church* :

'And now to God the Father,' he ends,
And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles :
Each listener chokes as he bows and bends,
And emotion pervades the crowded aisles.
Then the preacher glides to the vestry door,
And shuts it, and thinks he is seen no more.

The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
And re-enact at the vestry-glass
Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb-show
That had moved the congregation so.

The primary effect is of comedy. The actor is shown up when he least expects it. But Hardy is not merely a comedian even in this. His irony has a sharp edge and cuts deep. The small pupil, whose illusions are suddenly shattered, is a human being, and her mere presence gives a new depth to the ludicrous situation. Even here Hardy's tenderness is the spring of his inspiration, though it is disguised and almost transformed by his mockery.

There are deeper and more sinister cracks in life than histrionic pretensions, and Hardy's finest poetry comes when he allows his compassion to well up and flow without diversion or hindrance. In the short compass of a poem he was able to give as keen a pathos as in the large scale of a novel. Strange though some of his effects are, they are never false, and on the whole he avoids those errors of exaggeration which mar such episodes as the death of Jude's children. In his poetry Hardy often succeeds by concentrating on some

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central theme or final crisis which illuminates a whole story and shows what its real significance is. A characteristic example comes from the time of the South African War. In *Drummer Hodge* Hardy touches on the pathetic irony of the young soldier who is buried in the veldt which means nothing to him, beneath stars whose names he does not know:

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew —
Fresh from his Wessex home —
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

The formative idea is hard and clean, and it comes out with all the more force because it is held so firmly. So, more strikingly, in *The Newcomer's Wife* the subject is a man who wishes to marry a woman whose past is known to everyone but himself. He accidentally hears the truth about her, and the conclusion comes, brief and horrifying :

That night there was the splash of a fall
Over the slimy harbour-wall;
They searched, and at the deepest place
Found him with crabs upon his face.

There is no comment, no judgment. The poem succeeds through this final shock. It is story-telling reduced to a very small compass and charged with crisis.

Hardy is not always so objective as here, nor is there any reason why he should be. Sometimes his themes are so personal, and mean so much to him, that he is driven to make some comment on them. He does this with great tact, keeps his judgment until the end, and prepares the way for it by

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the objective presentation of a situation in which every detail has none the less a tragic or pathetic relevance, as in *At a Country Fair* :

At a bygone Western country fair
I saw a giant led by a dwarf
With a red string like a long thin scarf;
How much he was the stronger there
The giant seemed unaware.

And then I saw that the giant was blind,
And the dwarf a shrewd-eyed little thing;
The giant, mild, timid, obeyed the string
As if he had no independent mind
Or will of any kind.

Wherever the dwarf decided to go
At his heels the other trotted meekly,
(Perhaps — I know not — reproaching weakly)
Like one Fate bade that it must be so,
Whether he wished or no.

Various sights in various climes
I have seen, and more I may see yet,
But that sight never shall I forget,
And have thought it the sorriest of pantomimes,
If once, a hundred times.

The last verse with its deliberate simplicity clinches the question and pulls the whole poem into shape. Hardy's agonised pity comes out in its full force and gives a meaning to the detailed, well-observed situation which precedes it. Through these final lines, the incident, isolated and remote though it is, takes on a symbolical significance. The dominance of cunning over helpless innocence is seen in a concrete example which makes it extremely real and distressing.

Hardy's sensibility responded readily to quite humble and humdrum events, from which he extracted a poetry universal in its relevance. For instance, in *Beyond the Last Lamp* his subject is just a couple walking in the rain near Tooting Common. He does not know them or anything about them, but they have a tragic downcast look, and when

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some hours later he returns to the place, they are still there. The sight strikes Hardy with its inexplicable pathos and haunts him. He knows that so persistent a memory cannot be an accident, and he concludes with verses which are truly philosophical poetry, because in them an idea and the imaginative appreciation of it are completely united :

Though thirty years of blur and blot
Have slid since I beheld that spot,
And saw in curious converse there
Moving slowly, moving sadly,
That mysterious tragic pair,
Its olden look may linger on —
All but the couple ; they have gone.

Whither ? Who knows, indeed. . . . And yet
To me, when nights are weird and wet,
Without those comrades there at tryst
Creeping slowly, creeping sadly,
That lone lane does not exist.
There they seem brooding on their pain
And will, while such a lane remain.

Hardy is right. The mysterious couple, so vividly seen and so tenaciously remembered, are more real than the apparently real scene from which they have vanished.

The metaphysics of this poem may not be orthodox, but they are not very controversial. But though Hardy disclaimed any consistent or single philosophy, he was extremely interested in philosophical speculations and used them to give point and emphasis to his broodings on the universe. In his beliefs he was a true child of his time. Darwinism and the scientific study of history had undermined the traditional Christianity of his childhood. He did not break absolutely with it, but kept a loyal affection for biblical stories and told of the denial of Christ by Peter and of the Virgin's fears for her son, while in *Panthera* he made a fine use of the Jewish legend that Christ was the son of a Roman legionary. So vivid was his sense of the biblical past that when Allenby's soldiers entered Jezreel in 1918, Hardy could not but connect them with events of long ago and

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imagine that they were haunted by the blood-stained ghosts of Israel:

Faintly marked they the words 'Throw her down!' from the
Night eerily,
Spectre-spots of the blood of her body on some rotten wall ?
And the thin note of pity that came : 'A King's daughter is she,'
As they passed where she trodden was once by the chargers'
footfall ?

But though the Bible and Christian legend had this strong hold on Hardy's imagination, he rejected Christianity because he thought its doctrines untrue and because he felt that its official exponents denied the essential message of their Master. His intellect and his conscience forced him to look for some other system which should keep the Christian ethic without its divine sanction and account more satisfactorily for a universe which science and his own observation revealed as a stage for hideous conflicts and heart-breaking failures.

To this search Hardy found no satisfactory or final solution. If the philosopher with whom he had most in common was Schopenhauer, Hardy was too genuine a poet to be much interested in metaphysical argument. He believed that something was wrong with the scheme of things, and this conviction informed his whole outlook. He felt it without reference to any philosophy and turned it to purely poetical purposes. His controversy with official Christianity was part of his case against the universe. His deeply compassionate nature was outraged by the wrongs inflicted on men and "animals, and he laid some of the blame on the Christian system, which, as he believed, had betrayed the teachings of its Founder. So in *The Blinded Bird* he speaks in the language of St. Paul on behalf of a suffering creature against those who have tortured it:

So zestfully canst thou sing ?
And all this indignity,
With God's consent, on thee!
Blinded ere yet a-wing
By the red-hot needle thou,
I stand and wonder how
So zestfully thou canst sing

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Resenting not such wrong,
Thy grievous pain forgot,
Eternal dark thy lot,
Groping thy whole life long,
After that stab of fire ;
Enjailed in pitiless wire ;
Resenting not such wrong!

Who hath charity ? This bird.
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Is not provoked, though blind
And alive ensepulchred ?
Who hopeth, endureth all things ?
Who thinketh no evil, but sings ?
Who is divine ? This bird.

Hardy condemns a Christian society by its own standards, and his bold paradox rings true because he is deeply distressed by his pity for humble creatures like this bird.

When he tries to write a more abstract and more purely philosophical poetry, Hardy is less successful. He could indeed give a fine, clear form to ideas, as in three verses which set out various explanations of the faulty scheme of things :

'Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry ?

'Or come we of an Automaton,
Unconscious of our pains ? . . .
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone ?

'Or is it that some high Plan betides,
As yet not understood,
Of Evil stormed by Good,
We the Forlorn Hope over which the Achievement strides ?'

This is powerful and impressive, especially when it is taken away from its context. But in its context it is a little exaggerated. For the words are supposed to be spoken by trees, whose melancholy look round a pool makes Hardy believe that they ask these searching questions. So too Hardy is not entirely successful when he tries to write directly

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on cosmic matters. He has his own mythology, his Doomsters and Immanent Will and Spinner of the Years, but in themselves these figures are too dim and too abstract to be very effective, and Hardy seldom creates a myth substantial enough to give body and character to them. His genius was essentially dramatic, and his cosmic personalities are convincing only when they take part in human destinies and have the appeal of hidden forces who shape human actions. In *The Dynasts* he made a splendid use of them, but the scope of his lyrical poetry hardly allowed a similar success.

On the other hand Hardy found in Schopenhauer something which stood him in good stead. The conception of a world governed by a blind Will which does not care for good or for evil, for happiness or for sorrow, for fulfilment or for failure, was something bred in Hardy's own soul and needed only a little encouragement from outside to give it shape and confidence. Because he believed that the universe is senseless, he was able to give to his characters, no matter how humble, the tragic dignity which belongs to those who struggle in a hopeless cause. The qualities which he valued most highly were the fundamental charities. These he possessed himself, and he never questioned their worth. They meant everything to him, and he knew instinctively that they were right. So in his strange, eerie poem *To an Unborn Pauper Child* the grave accents in which he speaks of the dark menaces of life are tempered and ennobled by the close where he calls up some possibilities which none the less remain :

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
 One tear, one qualm,
 Should break the calm.
But I am weak as thou and bare ;
No man can change the common lot to rare.

Must come and bide. And such are we —
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary —
 That I can hope
 Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee : can dream thou'lt find
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind.

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It was in quiet simple things, in affection and gentle happiness, that Hardy sought a refuge from the failures and the catastrophes of the human lot.

Hardy was not only tender and compassionate ; he was almost incapable of hatred in any form or of the pious variations on it which sometimes parade as justice. Though he loved England and was proud of its history, and wrote moving poems on the war of 1914-18, there is no trace of hatred in them. He admires the soldiers who go out to die because they believe that their cause is just, and that is enough for him. Indeed his conviction that men and women are hardly responsible for their own actions but are largely moved by forces outside their control made him regard even criminals as pathetic creatures of circumstance, who deserve pity more than punishment. So at the time of the famous trial of Bywaters and Thompson, when a woman and her lover had murdered her husband, Hardy wrote *On the Portrait of a Woman about to be hanged*:

Comely and capable one of our race,
Posing there in your gown of grace,
Plain, yet becoming;
Could subtlest breast
Ever have guessed
What was behind that innocent face,
Drumming, drumming!

Would that your Causer, ere knoll your knell
For this riot of Passion, might deign to tell
Why, since It made you
Sound in the germ
It sent a worm
To madden Its handiwork, when It might well
Not have assayed you,

Not have implanted, to your deep rue,
The Clytaemnestra spirit in you,
And with purblind vision
Sowed a tare
In a field so fair,
And a thing of symmetry, seemly to view,
Brought to derision.

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For Hardy in the last resort the responsibility for evil lies not with human beings but with the system of things which makes them act as they do. For the poor agents of this blind Will he has nothing but compassion.

Hardy did not write poetry to exhibit a scheme of the universe, but he did in fact reveal such a scheme in the only way in which poetry can, that is in concrete instances where the individual case raises questions of vast import beyond itself and becomes an example and a symbol of universal laws. Whatever we may think of Hardy's religious and philosophical opinions, we cannot deny that they are indispensable to his poetry and rise from something in him which we cannot but admire and love, his responsive, sensitive, tender personality. He was a countryman affectionately at home not only with trees and flowers and waters, but with all living creatures, human or animal. He watched their dramas, great or small, their efforts to fulfil their desires and their many frustrations and failures. Just because he was essentially a dramatic poet, for whom the individual situation counted for so much that he must present it in its realistic details, he could never be a 'pure' poet like some of his contemporaries. For Hardy the earthiness of his subjects was an important element in his poetry. He was a man among other men, not a visionary or a mystic or a seer. In his poetry he gives us what he felt and saw, and gives it so fairly and candidly, and with so much truth to himself, that his occasional slips and uncertainties are of little account in the sum of his achievement.

XII

RUBÉN DARÍO

RUBÉN DARÍO (1867-1916) presents a signal case of a man who had a remarkable influence on poetry but whose own achievement may seem in retrospect not fully to deserve its first renown. That he, more than anyone else, was responsible for the dazzling revival of Spanish poetry with the generation of 1898 is beyond question. At the time when Spain lost to the United States the last remnants of her once world-wide empire this stranger from Nicaragua brought a ringing message of confidence and a range of verbal melodies such as Spain had never heard before. His metrical innovations, his rippling, lucent language, his unquestioning devotion to his art, did something to comfort Spain for her territorial losses by providing her with a new poetry. Through him men of pre-eminent gifts like Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez found their true selves and inaugurated an era of creative activity which lasted till the Civil War. Yet, great though Darío's influence undoubtedly was, its results were paradoxical. The poets whom he inspired reacted against his methods and were in no sense his disciples. There is no trace of his mellifluous ease in the Castilian austerity of Machado or the delicate impressionism of Jiménez. Nor has his reputation for originality weathered the years. It is true that he did something that had never been done before in Spanish and that he handled the language with a dexterity which first shocked, and then enthralled, a generation which had come to believe that poetry was dying from inanition, but we can now see that much of his work was not ultimately original but a brilliant transposition into Spanish of French images and cadences. He absorbed with uncommon skill the most prominent qualities of French poetry from Hugo and Gautier to Mallarmé and Verlaine and presented them in an

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alluring Spanish dress, but the substance remained French. Even in this Gallicising task Darío was not influenced by those who were the greatest forces in the development of modern poetry. Rimbaud, Corbifère, and Laforgue meant little or nothing to him, and though he was an ardent apostle of the Symbolists, we may doubt if he understood their essential aims. His achievement was largely derivative, and that no doubt is why he has lost some of his first glory.

It is not necessarily true that, because Darío's poetry is to some extent second-hand, it is therefore second-rate. European poetry presents many examples of men who have learned foreign manners and adapted them so skilfully and sincerely to their own languages that their work has a lasting appeal. The case against Darío is not so much that he derived his art from France as that he was too much concerned with the more superficial and more ephemeral qualities of his chosen masters. His metaphysical swans and butterflies, his Columbines and Pierrots, his figures from Greek myth, his *femmes fatales* like Herodias and Cleopatra, his scenes from Chinese vases and Japanese prints, his transposition of Catholic ritual to secular, erotic purposes, all betray their origins too candidly and suggest that Darío thought them to be essential elements of pure poetry, when in fact they were the fleeting fashions of an age whose other and richer resources escaped his attention. It is true that his debt to Verlaine was largely determined by a similarity of temperament, that Darío really had something of 'le pauvre Lelian' in his vagabond habits, his oscillations between gaiety and grief or between sin and repentance, and his childlike outlook on the world, but this similarity must not be pressed too far or made to justify too much. For Darío differed from Verlaine in several important respects. He was not a Parisian, not a European; he had nothing of Verlaine's cunning or love of mischief; his Catholicism was far less conscious and far less sophisticated; his literary training owed little to friends concerned with the same artistic problems as himself. If he was drawn to Verlaine by some similarity of personality and experience, he admired him chiefly because of his art. Much of Darío's poetry has lost

its first appeal because, despite his unfailing technique, his excellent ear and abounding vitality, too much of it is concerned with matters which no longer touch us seriously but have passed into the limbo of lost curiosities.

Yet, when all this is said, something in Darío's work is still alive and compelling and undeniably serious ; something still has more than a personal or historical interest and holds its own as original poetry. Amid all the flaunting stylishness, which has now rather faded, we come upon pieces which ring entirely true and have the authentic touch of a unique individual. But this individual has been misrepresented by false parallels and inapplicable standards. It is easy to think of Darío as yet another gifted wastrel of the Nineties, a Bohemian genius, who wrecked his health with drink and trailed a sordid entourage of mistresses from one place to another, whose air of innocent candour was no more than the impertinence of an overgrown urchin, and whose lack of any central philosophy was the defiant gesture of a sceptical and defeated age. It is no less easy to treat him as the typical poet of Latin America, who turned to the mother country and to Paris, the capital of the world, because he believed that in them he could find roots and feel at home, and whose success in Europe was a tribute paid to a prodigal son who brought back to Spain some return for what she had spent in the extravagance of imperial expansion. Neither of these views is right. Darío was a Bohemian only because he came from a simpler, less organised, less departmental, and less self-conscious world. His self-indulgence was that of a child of nature confronted with unexpected opportunities for pleasure, and he found no difficulty in combining it with hard work and the friendship of the best Spaniards of his time. His lack of philosophy is the natural condition of a man who has given his first love to art in a country where art hardly exists, and who for that reason treasures it beyond everything else and feels no call to look outside it. Nor is he the national voice of Latin America. There were indeed times when he spoke nobly for it, but they were almost incidental. Spain and France meant quite as much to him as his own country, and the world of his dreaming fancies

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meant more than any of them. To see him in his right perspective we must remember that he was a stranger from an undeveloped land, that he had Indian blood in his veins and lacked the complexity and the sophistication which would belong to a European of his gifts and tastes. He differs from European poets of his time because he speaks for human nature at a very simple level and takes things as they come without shaping his life to a plan. Even his assumption of Parisian airs betrays his tropical love of bright colours and his desire to do the smart thing with rather too much emphasis and display.

Because Darío formed his art far away from Europe and saw in European models all that poetry ought to be, it was almost impossible for him to surrender gains which had been made at so much cost to himself and with so proud a sense of achievement. That no doubt is why he persisted almost to his death in writing verses which repeat the mannerisms of *Prosas profanas* (1896). This kind of poetry was not only an ingrained element in his life but a consolation for his personal troubles. If for long periods Darío retired into a secluded universe of dreams, he was well aware of it and not in the least ashamed. In his view this was all too natural and too necessary in a world which wounded and depressed him. In defending his art against the critic José Enrique Rodó, Darío is perfectly frank about his position :

El dueño fuí de mi jardín de sueño,
lleno de rosas y de cisnes vagos;
el dueño de las tórtolas, el dueño
de góndolas y liras en los lagos.

.

(I was the master of my garden of dreams,
full of roses and wandering swans,
master of the turtledoves, master
of gondolas and lyres on the lagoons.)

Though this withdrawal into imagination won for Darío his first renown, it was not responsible for his best work. When he writes on these subjects, he usually lacks the full strength

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and conviction of which he is capable, and his comparative failure is yet another proof that it is the apparently most attractive and brilliant qualities of poetry which perish first, while its more solid and less obvious worth survives.¹

That Darío should wish for an escape into imaginary worlds was natural enough. He was troubled not only by his own temperament but by the society into which he had been born. Those who saw in him a laureate of Latin America must have been painfully shocked when they read his poem *A Colón*, which he wrote in 1892 for the fifth centenary of the discovery of America by Columbus. For an occasion which might all too easily have been drenched in sentimental rhetoric Darío paints a melancholy, even tragic picture of the New World which the great captain called into being. He dwells on its perpetual discords and wars, its perfidious ambitions and betrayed liberties, its destruction of ancient habits and its failure to put anything in their place. He cries out that it would have been better if Columbus had never sailed :

i Pluguiera a Dios las aguas antes intactas
no reflejaran nunca las blancas velas ;
ni vieran las estrellas estupefactas
arribar a la orilla tus carabelas!

.
(Would that the waters hitherto untouched
had never reflected the white sails ;
would that the stupefied stars had not seen
your caravels come to shore.)

Then indeed the aboriginal Americans might have been left to their primitive occupation of hunting pumas and bisons in the forests and on the mountains. In such a world even the introduction of Christianity means nothing; for Christ is neglected, while Barabbas enslaves the people. And as for the gifts of civilisation, what can be said for it when it has

¹ 'Le style sec traverse le temps comme une momie incorruptible, cependant que les autres, gonflés de graisse et subornés d'imageries, pourrissent dans leurs bijoux. On retire plus tard quelques diadèmes et quelques bagues, de leurs tombes.' Paul Valéry, *Tel quel*, ii, 334.

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given over to panthers the ancient cities of Chibcha, Cuzco, and Palenque ? Dario sums up this sorry history :

Duelos, espantos, guerras, fiebre constante
en nuestra senda ha puesto la suerte triste :
i Cristóforo Colombo, pobre Almirante,
ruega a Dios por el mundo que descubriste !

.
(Afflictions, terrors, wars, and constant fever
miserable chance has set upon our way;
Christopher Columbus, poor Admiral,
pray to God for the world that you discovered.)

With time Darío was indeed to modify his views, and in his *A Roosevelt* to set against the crude ambitions of the United States his own Latin America with its Christianity, its tenderness, its ancient ceremonies. But his lines to Columbus spring from something deep in his being, his appalled realisation of the world to which by birth he belonged; and that is why this poem is more impressive than his challenge to Roosevelt, which somehow asserts too much and fails to carry us with it.

With this background behind him, and with all the music of French poetry in his head, Darío inevitably retired into fancies of his own making and was comforted by the thought that all over the world other poets were doing the same thing. He accepted from the start the view that poetry is an escape from the squalors of existence and must offer some harmonious alternative to them. When a poet does this, there is always a danger that his work will fail because it is insufficiently related to ordinary existence and lacks the substance which comes from a close contact with common life. When this poetry of escape succeeds, as it does in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* or in Keats' *La Belle Dame sans merci* it is because the dream becomes a vehicle for something else which belongs to the waking consciousness, and expresses through forceful imagery what the considering mind expresses less happily through analytical abstractions. Poetry of this kind needs an intimate relation to events of every day and must appeal as a heightened, purified form of them. How-

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ever mysterious and impalpable it may be, we must assume that it speaks of something intelligible and has a message of some importance. In the last resort the poetry of escape, of a search for an ideal order or a 'beyond', must reflect some deep need in ourselves and provide for it a satisfaction which is not mere dream or mere fancy but is more solid and more absorbing than what we find in the daily round. In this respect Darío often fails. Though his desire for escape was often prompted by powerful motives, he did not often write about it in its full strength, but disguised it in the imaginary-scenes in which his fancy delighted but which were liable to omit much of the experience which preceded their creation. Indeed these scenes are sometimes insufficiently imagined. Neither by temperament nor by conviction was Darío really fitted to follow Mallarmé in his search for a mystical or ideal 'beyond'. He felt that he was committed to a search, but he did not always know what he sought, and was liable to be led astray by his august masters and to feel that quite ordinary objects of desire were more remarkable than they actually are.

It would not be untrue to say that at its best Darío's 'beyond' was like the pleasure which children find in fairy-tales. He was able to lose himself in vivid fancies and not to ask for any meaning in them beyond the most obvious and most immediate. When he followed this impulse, he was able to put all his resources of rhythm and imagery to good use and to create something which stands on its own in some fascinating Never-Never-Land. So when he wanted to give pleasure to a young girl called Margarita Debayle, he wrote a delicate fairy-tale which surely pleased her and certainly pleased him. In it a young princess picks a star. Her father is furious and accuses her of a mad and godless caprice. Then Christ appears and tells her that she can have it. The king capitulates handsomely, and, when he sees white robes in the sky, sends out four hundred elephants to the sea-shore to pay homage. It is a trifle of gossamer, a toy for a child, but within its frail limits faultless. It succeeds because Darío's princess is just like other children and her picking of a star is what any child might in the right circumstances do :

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Las princesas primorosas
se parecen mucho a ti;
cortan lirios, cortan rosas,
cortan astros. Son así.

(Beautiful princesses
are much the same as you.
They pick lilies, pick roses,
pick stars. That's what they do.)

Darío succeeds because he is perfectly at home in this world of childhood and confines himself carefully to it. We do not look for any ulterior meaning, and we would not find one if we did.

Darío naturally could not and would not always so restrict himself, and his art would have suffered greatly if he had. He wished to advance beyond fairy-tales to situations in which vivid shapes stand for something else and give contour and significance to it. In this he struck an obstacle common enough in such poetry. It is difficult to make the poetical meaning emerge in its full strength without either being lost in the individual images or coming out too starkly in purely intellectual language which defies and defeats the symbols. Such a task requires an excellent judgment and a firm notion of what the central theme really is. Darío, perhaps with Mallarmé's *UApres-Midi d'un Faune* in his mind, attempted a symbolical poem of some length in his *Coloquio de los Centauros*, in which he uses the Greek Centaurs to discuss fundamental issues of life and death. The sensuous richness of the decoration has something in common with Mallarmé's sultry afternoon, but the Centaurs have no very marked individualities, and their interchange of speeches is no more than a device to let Darío think aloud. That he claims a high symbolical intention is clear when he makes Chiron say :

toda forma es un gesto, una cifra, un enigma;
en cada átomo existe un incógnito estigma;
cada hoja de cada árbol canta un propio cantar
y hay un alma en cada una de las gotas del mar.

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(Every form is a gesture, a cipher, a riddle;
in every atom exists an unknown sign;
every leaf of every tree sings its own song
and there is a soul in every single drop of the sea.)

Here Darío surely had in mind Baudelaire's famous sonnet *Correspondances*, where natural things are said to be symbols of other, more mysterious realities. But Darío, with his simpler and plainer outlook, does not go so far as this and contents himself with saying that every natural thing has its own individuality. It is a perfectly tenable view, but it is not necessarily tied to the use of symbols or to the cult of the ideal. At the start Darío uses this elaborate method to suggest that he is probing a deep mystery, but what he says makes us think that he may not after all be pursuing any very remote or intangible end.

As the poem proceeds, it becomes clear that this is so. So far from using his Centaurs for remarkable states of mind or to display some remote, almost inexpressible reality, Darío conducts a poetical discourse on the ends of life, and when, after discussing song, love, and strength, he decides that the most important thing is death, we are a little disappointed and feel that the presentation is too grandiose for so clear and emphatic a conclusion. Darío has made the mistake of allowing his conclusion to emerge too easily from the enveloping symbols, and we feel that the decoration is largely there for its own sake and has no functional purpose. The truth is that the technique which Darío uses here was intended by its inventors to deal with mysteries beyond the reach of exact description and with a mystical vision which can be conveyed only by hints and allusions. Darío had no such vision. Though he talked about the Beautiful and the Ideal, his concept of them had little of the range and magnificence which Mallarmé found in 'le Néant'. His natural simplicity, which rejoiced in the pictorial attraction of such symbols as the swan or Pegasus, shrank from giving them their full implications. If Darío was a Symbolist, his Symbolism was not of the most advanced or most authentic kind, since he used his symbols for matters which he could easily convey through plain statement and to which he could even give

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names, whereas the essence of French Symbolism is that it conveys realities which have no names and are beyond the reach of direct description.

Darío was more successful when he set firm limits to his subject and did not try to make too much of it. In *Sonatina* he tells a story very close to fairy-tale, of a young princess who lies sunk in day-dreams of a perfect love. Darío tells the story so gaily and so brilliantly that we hardly look for an ulterior or secondary meaning. He builds up his situation with affectionate care and fully indulges his taste for bright, luscious things. While the princess dreams in her golden chair, the peacocks parade in the garden, the buffoon pirouettes in his scarlet dress, and the swans float on the azure lake. Her dreams are of impossible splendours and unrealisable hopes :

i Ay! la pobre princesa de la boca de rosa
quiere ser golondrina, quiere ser mariposa,
tener alas ligeras, bajo el cielo volar;
ir al sol por la escala luminosa de un rayo,
saludar a los Írrios con los versos de mayo,
o perderse en el viento sobre el trueno del mar.

.
(Ah, the poor princess with her rosy mouth,
wishes to be a swallow, to be a butterfly;
to have light wings, to fly under the sky;
to go to the sun by the gleaming stair of a sunbeam,
to salute the lilies with the verses of May,
or to lose herself in the wind above the sea's thunder.)

The poem passes beyond fairy-tale because it has more conviction and more passion than such a tale needs. Darío brings off a success in a very difficult medium because his details, however brilliant in themselves, contribute to a single, complex effect. The inner world of the princess is as rich and radiant as the outer world which she ignores, and between the two she is revealed as a creature very rare and precious and far removed from ordinary existence.

Sonatina, however, is more than this. The princess's day-dreams prepare the way to a resounding climax, in

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which Darío passes beyond the mere story to something else :

i Calla, calla, princesa — dice el hada madrina:—
en caballo con alas hacia acá se encamina,
en el cinto la espada y en la mano el azor,
el feliz caballero que te adora sin verte,
y que llega de lejos, vencedor de la Muerte,
a encenderte los labios con su beso de amor!

(Silence, silence, princess — says the fairy godmother —
on a winged horse travels hither,
sword on his belt and hawk in his hand,
the happy knight who adores you without seeing you,
and who comes from afar, conqueror of death,
to set your lips aflame with his kiss of love.)

Skilfully and carefully, but with true dramatic effect, Darío raises the end to a symbolical significance. The knight, who has defeated death, is the symbol of ideal love, and his arrival gives a new dimension. What was only an imaginative story becomes a myth in which the old notion of a love stronger than death takes a new form. Though even here Darío is far from finding an ideal comparable in scope and mystery to Mallarmé's 'le Néant', he finds a substitute in love, and he is wise to do so, for this is a matter which he understands and is able to present with a full wealth of poetry. He has turned his own dreams to good account by attaching them to other and older dreams and relating them to a notion which, however fantastic, still appeals to something deep in the human heart.

In poems like this Darío built his secret defences against the blows of circumstance. He needed such protection and felt happy with it, but he was aware that it was not unassailable, that he could not completely escape from common life or his own darker moods. Much though he cultivated his day-dreams, he felt that they were not everything and that as an honest artist he must pay proper attention to the actual world and face the consequences. In his poem to Rodó he gives something like a spiritual autobiography, in which he tells how he has moved from his first deliberate absorption

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in fancies to a condition closer to common day. He explains his early withdrawal as a revolt against 'the world, the flesh, and Hell', and though he does not in the least regret it, he knows that no man can maintain such a seclusion for ever and that he must sooner or later abandon it for something else, for truth and simplicity; that he must allow his soul to go naked into the mysteries of the eternal harmony and nourish its inner flame on 'life, light, and truth'. He recognises that in the last resort truth may be beyond reach and perfection unattainable, but he sees the way towards them :

Por eso ser sincere es ser potente ;
de desnuda que está, brilla la estrella;
el agua dice el alma de la fuente
en la voz de cristal que fluye d'ella.

(For that reason to be sincere is to be powerful,
it is because it is naked, that the star shines;
the water tells the soul of the fountain
in the voice of crystal which flows from it.)

When Darío speaks of sincerity, he reminds us of the great change which came over such poets as W. B. Yeats and Alexander Blok when they gave up their first, entrancing dreams to face naked facts. Darío's intention resembles theirs, but he differs from them because his decision demands a much less violent break with his earlier outlook. For him dreams are still a part of truth so long as the poet speaks truthfully of them. In his career there is no such abrupt division as there is in that of Yeats or Blok. None the less he knew that dreams were not enough and must not be indulged in entirely for their own sake. They must be tempered by truth, and this in his own way he tried to do.

If Darío reached these decisions through natural honesty, his personal experience sometimes forced him into a poetry very different from that which he most delighted to write. When he was not on the wings of dreams, he was liable to be assailed by dark melancholy, which was all the darker because he tried to assuage it with drink. At such times he felt himself unarmed against the attacks of circumstance and

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attributed his very vulnerability to his poetical calling. He, who was naturally so sensitive to impressions of many kinds and who attached such importance to receiving them and translating them into poetry, found that this task was at times almost more than he could bear. The effort which it demanded, the extreme uncertainty which obsessed him during it, the contrast between his inner life and the brutal facts around him, made him feel that he was the victim of a terrible curse, a man set aside for a peculiarly painful and exhausting task. To adjust his inspiration to his art demanded and took everything from him, as he says in *Melancholia* :

Hermano, tú que tienes la luz, dime la mía.
Soy como un ciego. Voy sin rumbo y ando a tientas.
Voy bajo tempestades y tormentas
ciego de ensueño y loco de armonía.

Ese es mi mal. Soñar. La poesía
es la camisa férrea de mil puntas cruentas
que llevo sobre el alma. Las espinas sangrientas
dejan caer las gotas de mi melancolía.

Y así voy, ciego y loco, por este mundo amargo
a veces me parece que el camino es muy largo,
y a veces que es muy corto. . . .

y en este titubeo de aliento y agonía,
carga lleno de penas lo que apenas soporto.
¿ No oyes caer las gotas de mi melancolía ?

.
(Brother, you who have the light, give me mine.
I am like a blind man. I go without direction and grope
in the dark.
I go under tempests and torments
blind with dream and mad with harmony.

This is my curse. To dream. Poetry
is the iron shirt of a thousand bloody spikes
that I wear over my soul. The bloodstained thorns
make fall the drops of my melancholy.

And so I go, blind and mad, through this bitter world;
at times I think that the way is longer,
and at times that it is shorter . . .

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and in this staggering between breath and agony,
I bear full of afflictions that which I scarcely support.
Do you not hear the drops of my melancholy fall ?)

In a crisis like this Darío, with his untutored simplicity and his complete lack of irony, is able to speak with a force beyond the range of many more gifted and more sophisticated poets. His whole being is absorbed in his predicament, and he feels it so strongly that nothing comes between him and its complete presentation.

If his creative task placed special burdens on Darío, they aggravated troubles that were already his. Inevitably at times he felt that he had wasted his life and failed to fulfil his promise or his hopes. He was tortured by shame and guilt and found, especially when he was alone at night, that he could not withstand or placate the sharp pangs of conscience. Like Baudelaire, he draws from such humiliating moments a poetry of special intimacy and candour, but he differs from Baudelaire in the character of his response. Baudelaire is dominated by disgust at himself and feels that only God can deliver him by enabling him to master it by courage and intellect:

Ah! Seigneur! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon coeur et mon corps sans dégoût!

Darío's mood is less sharp and more despairing. He seems to have no hope and to see no way out; so dominated is he by his sense of failure. Here too his simplicity gives a remarkable force to his poetry. On such a matter he speaks straight from the heart and indulges in no illusions :

Y el pesar de no ser lo que yo hubiera sido,
la pérdida del reino que estaba para mí,
el pensar que un instante pude no haber nacido,
i y el sueño que es mi vida desde que yo nací!

(And the weight of not being that which I could have been,
the loss of the kingdom that was waiting for me,
the thought that an instant might not have been born,
and the dream that is my life since my birth.)

To appreciate Darío's treatment of this theme we may compare it with lines in which Rossetti, who indulged similar appetites and suffered from similar remorse, expressed himself:

Look in my face ; my name is Might-have-been ;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell.

The grand style exalts the theme and makes it less personal, and in so doing diminishes some of its authentic horror. But Darío, who speaks with perfect frankness because he cannot deceive himself about the melancholy facts, touches us more intimately and more poignantly.

Though Darío was in no sense a philosopher, his depressions sometimes forced him into statements in which he looks at the scheme of things and passes judgment against it. His condemnations, delivered with an apt imagery and consummate restraint, recall those moments when the Greek poets at some sublime and tragic crisis proclaim that it were best not to have been born. But whereas they say this because circumstances prove too hard for man and make all his ambitions futile, Darío speaks from a painful, personal situation in which his tortured consciousness makes him hate to be alive. This is the burden of one of his most impressive poems, *Lo Fatal (Doom)*, in which, with measured solemnity and no trace of rhetoric or display, he leads from a quiet start to an agonised conclusion :

Dichoso el árbol que es apenas sensitivo,
y màs la piedra dura porque esa ya no siente,
pues no hay dolor màs grande que el dolor de ser vivo,
ni mayor pesadumbre que la vida consciente.

Ser, y no saber nada, y ser sin rumbo cierto,
y el temor de haber sido y un futuro terror . . .
y el espanto seguro de estar mañana muerto,
y sufrir por la vida y por la sombra y por

lo que no conocemos y apenas sospechamos,
y la carne que tienta con sus frescos racimos,
y la tumba que aguarda con sus funebres ramos,
i y no saber adónde vamos
ni de dónde venimos . . . !

.

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(Happy the tree that scarcely feels,
and happier the hard stone because it does not feel at all,
since no pain is greater than the pain of being alive,
nor affliction heavier than conscious life.

To be, and to know nothing, and to be with no sure goal,
and the fear of having been, and a terror to come . . .
and the certain horror of being dead to-morrow,
and to suffer for life, and for the shadow, and for

what we know not and hardly suspect,
and the flesh that tempts us with its fresh clusters,
and the tomb that waits with its funeral wreaths,
and not to know whither we go,
nor whence we come . . .)

This is not emptiness or guilt but despairing fear, the heart-cry of an extremely sensitive man who looks with horror on his human state and sees no hope in the future to atone for the ghastly present. Unlike Leopardi, who plumbed similar depths, Darío does not regard death as a merciful deliverance but finds its daily menace yet another misery in life. Most men shrink from asking what death really means, and to think of it too precisely is to feel the reason unseated, but Darío, in applying his whole mind to it, catches the very essence of its terror, which is precisely that it cannot be understood or imagined and therefore cannot be faced.

Sonatina on the one hand and *Lo Fatal* on the other mark the poles between which Darío's genius moved, and show the contrast and the discord between his soaring fantasies and his moments of abasement. They illustrate how difficult it was for him to maintain his early conception of poetry as an ivory tower which protected him from himself. He oscillated between the two extremes, and if he writes more often about his exalted than about his depressed moments, it is the latter which provoke the stronger poetry. This is perhaps because the scale of his catastrophes summoned his deepest powers to work and eliminated much that flourished only on the surface of his consciousness. To bridge the gap between the two states presented problems both personal and artistic; he must face his own situation, and then he could

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transform it into art. In his own way Darío solved both these problems. Despite long bouts of dissipation, *delirium tremens* and prolonged bad health, he lived to be nearly fifty without seriously impairing his mental or poetical powers. He was fortunate in his friends, who looked after him with devoted care, and in his own temperament, which was able to recover with remarkable resilience from his blackest moods. How he did this can be seen from *No obstante* (*Notwithstanding*), in which he tells how he feels an earthquake in his mind and fears that he may see the abyss which haunted Pascal in his last days or the 'wing of idiocy' which struck Baudelaire. But he is not dismayed. He gathers his strength and chooses to live :

Hay, no obstante, que ser fuerte ;
pasar todo precipicio
y ser vencedor del Vicio,
de la Locura y la Muerte.

(I must, notwithstanding, be strong;
pass every precipice
and be conqueror of Vice,
of Madness and Death.)

Darío sees the situation quite simply and makes his decision with admirable fortitude. A man, who faced his own problems in this way, was not likely to shirk similar problems in his art.

The dualism of Darío's character and life made it difficult for him to put the whole of himself into any single poem. Yet if he was to realise the full promise of his gifts, this was necessary, as he himself knew. Between dream and despair, between order and chaos, he had to find some compromise or adjustment. This was in the main a question for his art. In his own life he could turn to his Catholicism and find the consolation and the forgiveness which he required. Towards the end of his life, when the First World War brought home to him the hideous anarchy of human society, he resorted more consciously to his faith and shaped it into a more coherent structure. But this did not affect his poetry very

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profoundly. His last poems have indeed a touching simplicity, but they lack his earlier force and suggest that in his final years his creative impulse had begun to lose some of its drive. But in the heyday of his powers, though sometimes he wrote poems of an exquisite and lucid Christianity, as when he describes the angelus in the dawn or tells of the Three Wise Men, these are not very close to his inner struggles. More important are those pieces in which he faced his troubles with courage and candour and saw that what he found in himself was something that permeated the whole world and deserved to be spoken of with all the sincerity that he could summon. By an apt choice of a subject which illustrated his own discords he was able to give his complete self to poetry and to show of what scope he was capable.

One means of resolving his discords which appealed to Darío was to deny that in the last analysis they existed, to assert that the contradictions and discrepancies which ordinary men denounce do not matter for the artist, who moves in his own world by his own laws. In asserting this Darío felt that he was speaking for the oppressed and the misunderstood against the dogmas and conventions which harass them. This was of course no final solution to his problem, but it was at least a brave and conscious attempt to see what the problem was. So in *Letania de Nuestro Señor Don Quijote* he applies the method of Baudelaire's *Les Litanies de Satan* and addresses a prayer to the wonderful character who stands for so much in the Spanish consciousness. Of course the Don is totally unlike Baudelaire's Satan, but he is none the less a suitable figure to invoke for the causes which Darío has at heart. Darío indeed makes rather too much of him and assumes that he must necessarily share all his own pet aversions, such as Nietzsche's Superman, Academies, and the rule of the crowd. But in effect Darío speaks for the life of the imagination, which resolves political and ethical discords and provides a system of behaviour based on personal honour. Of course the Don appeals to him because he too is a dreamer, but he is much more than that, and in praising him Darío asserts the power of dreams to inspire courageous action. He sees something holy in the Don's chivalrous

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outlook and regards him as a true hero who tilts against all the wrong assumptions and restricting categories of the modern world. He sees that such a man defies the ordinary distinctions of truth and falsehood, but thinks that he is all the better for it, because he stands for the life of the spirit and the imaginative approach to experience :

Noble peregrino de los peregrinos,
que santificaste todos los caminos
con el paso augusto de tu heroicidad,
contra las certezas, contra las conciencias,
y contra las leyes y contra las ciencias,
contra la mentira, contra la verdad.

(Noble pilgrim of the pilgrims,
you have sanctified every road
with the august passage of your heroism,
against certainties, against consciences,
and against laws, and against sciences,
against falsehood, against truth.)

This poem represents a position which Darío undeniably held at times, but it is rather the climax of his attachment to dreams than the beginning of his search for truth. By denying the need for truth, he may indeed speak for his own cause, but he cannot defy the forces of reality which break into his life and compel him to pay attention to them. In the figure of the Don Darío speaks for the aesthetic outlook. It is his most remarkable statement of it, but he was not ultimately content with it.

Against this poem we may set another, which represents a different point of view. In *Los Motives del Lobo* (*The Motives of the Wolf*) Darío takes the story of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio and makes it the myth for something that troubled and touched him deeply. Aware as he was of the beauty of holiness, and equally aware of the limitless corruption of men, he found in this story a myth for his own divided feelings. St. Francis, with his 'heart of lily, cherub's soul, and celestial tongue', was in his very simplicity and warmth of heart dear to Darío. He tells how the Saint wins over the terrible wolf, who puts out his paw in friendship

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and comes to live in the convent. For a time this happy association lasts, but then the wolf disappears, and once again stories reach the Saint of its violent ravages. He seeks it out on the mountains and appeals to it to return, but the wolf gives a terrible answer. He was, he says, happy in the convent, but he found that life there was just as evil as elsewhere, and his account of it is not unlike Darío's earlier account of Latin America :

Hermanos a hermanos hacían la guerra,
perdían los débiles, ganaban los malos,
hembra y macho eran como perro y perra,
y un buen día todos me dieron de palos.

.
(Brothers made war on brothers,
the weak lost, the wicked gained,
woman and man were like bitch and dog,
and one fine day they all took sticks to me.)

The wolf, true to St. Francis, does not resist, because it believes that all creatures are its brothers. None the less it is beaten and thrown out. So it resumes its old life of rapine and feels that it is at least better than those who have persecuted it. It concludes by telling the Saint that they must go their separate ways :

Déjame en el monte, déjame en el risco,
déjame existir en mi libertad,
vete a tu convento, hermano Francisco,
sigue tu camino y tu santidad.

.
(Leave me on the mountain, leave me on the cliff,
leave me to live in my liberty,
go to your convent, brother Francis,
follow your way and your sanctity.)

The wolf speaks for Darío, who believed that the dichotomy between holiness and corruption is almost absolute and that in an evil world it is all but necessary to be evil. But from this Darío creates poetry, because he sees the situation fairly and freely from both sides, and reaches a conclusion which is

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tragic in its very inconclusiveness. Here, as in the poem to Don Quixote, his solution is not philosophical but artistic. He presents a situation which we can accept and understand, but to which we can see no end. The conflict which he dramatises he knows both from other men and from himself, and he sets it out with an impressive and touching pathos. So far as his art is concerned, he has closed the gap between competing and opposite tendencies in himself.

In these two poems Darío accepts certain facts about human life and shows his personal approach to them. They show a wider understanding than either *Sonatina* or *Lo Fatal* and prove that at times he could attain what Yeats called a 'unity of being'. For though the discords remain unresolved, he has mastered them in his art. But once at least Darío did more than this, and united all his different and discordant forces in a single complex experience, showing that he could sometimes transcend his inner struggles and make everything in himself work to a single end without losing its individuality. This he does in what is surely his finest poem, *Condón de Otoño en Primavera* (*Song of Autumn in Spring*). It is the history of his loves, but it is much more than that. It is a series of brilliant and touching variations on an elegiac theme, which is presented at the start and recurs four more times in the poem :

i Juventud, divino tesoro,
ya te vas para no volver!
Cuando quiero llorar, no lloro,
y a veces lloro sin querer.

.
(Youth, divine treasure,
you go, never to return!
When I wish to weep, I do not weep,
and at times I weep without wishing.)

On this basis Darío builds his story of three women whom he has loved, and to each he gives a mixture of lyrical exaltation and realistic irony, without allowing either to spoil the other. He paints each woman in a few deft strokes and displays with a tolerance that is half regretful and half

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humorous their illusions and his own, from his first timid love for a girl whom he saw as Herodias or Salome, to another who nursed his dreams and killed them, and a third, who, in the excess of physical passion, hoped to discover some Eden of the flesh and took no thought for the passing of love and youth. Nowhere else does Darío choose his images with such point and such detachment. He recaptures the atmosphere in which he once lived, and enjoys again the old enchantment, while he laments its passing. Into this poem Darío has put the whole of himself, his illusions and dreams, his irony and melancholy, his eye for the significant detail and his irrepressible gift of song.

The conclusion of the poem is Darío's solution of his own conflicts so far as he ever solved them in his art. He knows that his dreams bear very little relation to life and that he can never realise them. He confesses his defeat, and then almost immediately admits that he has no intention of abandoning his search for a perfect love :

En vano busqué a la princesa
que estaba triste de esperar.
La vida es dura. Amarga y pesa.
¡ Ya no hay princesa que cantar!

Mas a pesar del tiempo terco,
mi sed de amor no tiene fin ;
con el cabello gris, me acerco
a los rosales del jardín.

(In vain I searched for the princess
for whom I was weary of waiting.
Life is hard. Bitter and burdensome.
There is no princess to sing!

But in spite of stubborn time
my thirst for love has no end ;
with gray hair I approach
the rose-trees of the garden.)

If here regret seems to be Darío's dominant note, yet it is countered by his candid confession that he cannot give up

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his old ways, and still more by his finale, when, after repeating his refrain, he finishes with the single line :

I Mas es mía el Alba de oro!

.

(But the Dawn of gold is mine!)

In this way he triumphs over his failures, his depressions, his disillusionments. And the triumph is won through poetry. What survives is just his imaginative approach to life, his taste for the affections and the mirages which they create, his many-sided understanding of the human temperament with its moods and vagaries and contradictions.

It was Darío's fortune to be born at a time when the poetry of his own language had nothing to teach him, and he turned for help and inspiration to France. He found them indeed in abundance, and they made him a poet. Yet he was not altogether lucky in this, since his simple, natural character was better suited to a less elaborate, less sophisticated, and less ambitious art. His French schooling imposed on his extremely receptive spirit a manner which he wore with a remarkable brilliance and variety but which at times his inner life forced him to modify or to reject. This hampered the development of his talents and made him seem a minor disciple of the Symbolist school, when he might well have been something more original. More than this, his French attachments strengthened him in his desire for escape and his cult of dreams. Yet just because he cherished this, it provoked a conflict in him which was responsible for his best work, whether he spoke from the depths of melancholy about his falls from imaginative grace or wove together all the strands of his passionate personality into enchanting patterns of song.

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